

A fine writer, Dr Verrier Elwin's many anthropological monographs and rich collection of oral traditions of the adivasis are some of the best documentations on tribal culture. This collection of tribal stories were selected by Elwin himself from amongst the many thousands and written down almost exactly as they were told to him. Few of the tribal stories point a moral, but they have their own interest and excitement. A charm and freshness that reflects the freedom and gaiety of their life and the beauty of their environments.

Dr. Verrier Elwin (1902-1964) belonged to one of those rare breed of rebel Christian missionaries, who first came to India to work as an anglican in the Christ Seva Sangha at Pune. The turning point in his life came when he, prompted by the call of Gandhi, settled down in a remote tribal village in central India and chose the service of tribals as his life's mission.



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WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG

VERRIER ELWIN



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Folklore of India

WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG

Folk-tales from India's Hills and Forests

VERRIER ELWIN

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AMINA JAYAL

with a foreword by
RAMACHANDRA GUHA



NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

*For
Wasant, Nakul and Ashok*

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Foreword

When the World was Young contains a wideranging selection of folktales from the tribal communities of India. The book has wonderful accounts of how the world was made, how a river finds its course, and what causes earthquakes. These stories are richly evocative, and certainly more engaging than purely scientific, dry-as-dust explanations of the same phenomena. Other tales provide explanations how humans began to talk and see, the origins of cloth and clothing, and the discovery of fire. Some stories recount human encounters with animals, both intimate and hostile, and the origin of animal characteristics. We learn here why frogs have thin legs, and why elephants do not have wings.

The topical variety of these tales is matched by their geographical range, for they originate in tribes as farflung as the Baiga, who live in the forests of central India, and the Minyong, who are to be found on the banks of the Siang river in Arunachal. In both respects the stories reflect the rich and enormously varied life of their compiler. Born in 1902, Verrier Elwin was one of this century's great pioneering anthropologists. Elwin first came to India in 1927, following a brilliant academic career at the University of Oxford. He soon came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi, and became a rebel against the Raj, an Englishman who campaigned energetically for India's freedom from British rule.

In 1932, Elwin settled with his lifelong companion, Shamrao Hivale, in a remote Gond village in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh. Here the two friends set up the Gond Seva Mandal, a welfare organization designed to bring modern education and modern medicine to the tribals. Their early encounters with the tribes are described

in Elwin's charming memoir of life with the Gonds, *Leaves from the Jungle* (first published in 1936). In that book he relates how he became enchanted with the tribal culture and way of life, and began collecting and translating their stories and myths. While Shamrao Hivale supervised the schools and hospitals of the Gond Seva Mandal, Elwin roamed through the tribal regions of present-day Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra and Bihar. Based on his enquiries, he wrote a series of authoritative studies of the different communities he encountered. But Elwin's interest in the tribals was by no means a narrowly scientific one. Deeply disturbed by their loss of rights in land and forests, and the erosion of their culture, he became a self-appointed yet uniquely effective spokesman for the 25 million *adivasis* of central India. Indeed, it was chiefly through Verrier Elwin's books, articles, lectures, films and photographs that urban Indians first became aware of the life and problems of their tribal countrymen.

After Independence came, in August 1947, Elwin became by law what he had long been in heart and mind, that is, a citizen of India. By now, he had forged an impressive network of admirers and supporters, which included Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. On Nehru's recommendation Elwin was appointed Adviser on Tribal Affairs to the Government of the North East Frontier Agency (now known as Arunachal Pradesh). In this inaccessible and little-known part of India, Elwin's job was to study the living conditions of the tribes and advise government on its policies towards them. Once again, he focused attention on the strengthening of tribal rights in land and forest. For his services to the *adivasis*, and in recognition of his contributions to Indian anthropology, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1961. Verrier Elwin died in February 1964, an esteemed and greatly loved public figure in his adopted land.

Elwin's life and work are beautifully summed up in his autobiography, *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin*, which was

finished before he died but published posthumously. (This book, as well as *Leaves from the Jungle*, have recently been republished: both are highly recommended.) Elwin was by turns a propagandist, a social worker, an anthropologist, and a government official. But he was above all a writer, the author of over twenty five books, ranging from ethnographies to novels and from histories of art to autobiographies. He also brought out five large volumes of folktales, from which *When the World was Young* is distilled. This volume, like many of the other books he wrote, affirms both Elwin's empathy with the tribes and his skills as a storyteller. First published in 1961, and reprinted in 1966, it is now being reissued for a new generation of readers.

1995

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

Preface

I have been collecting stories in the hills and forests of India for just thirty years and have published a little over two thousand of them. In this small book I have gathered a few that describe the people's idea of what life was like in the days when the world was young, or at least younger than it is today. Some of them describe how the world began and what sort of men and women lived in it at first. Others suggest how some of the essentials of human life—the use of fire, the building of houses, the weaving of cloth—were invented. Yet others recall the exciting days when men and animals lived together and talked to one another, and the strange adventures that people had when magic was still real and strong. Death was a stranger in the old world and a few stories tell us how he first came, not to make men sad but to console them and lift from them the burden of having to live too long.

These stories are taken from my earlier books—*Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* (Oxford University Press, 1944), *Myths of Middle India* (O.U.P., 1949), *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (O.U.P., 1954), *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* (North-East Frontier Agency, 1958), and *The Baiga* (John Murray, 1939). To the publishers of these I make my grateful acknowledgements.

Shillong
December 1, 1960

VERRIER ELWIN

THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

The Making of the World

There are many different traditions in the hills and forests of India about the creation of the world. Some say it was hatched out of an enormous egg, others that it was moulded by God with his own hands. But the majority agree in thinking that there was originally a great ocean of water, and that earth was brought up from the bottom and spread over the surface in some such way as is described here by the Baigas, who live in the splendid forests of central India.

In the beginning there was nothing but water, water, water. There was no voice of God, no voice of demon, no wind, no rocks, no paths, no jungle. As the sky is now, so was water then. On a lotus-leaf, which drifted here and there on the waters, sat the Great God. There was no fruit or flower to his life: he was alone. One day he rubbed his arm, and with the dirt that came from it he made Crow, his daughter, and when she was big enough to fly, he said to her, 'Go and find some earth for me, I am lonely here; I want to make a world.'

Crow flew and flew, flew and flew, who knows where she went. At last the breath left her body and she fell with a thud on the back of Tortoise, who was sitting in the water with one arm on the bottom of the ocean and one arm reaching to the sky.

Tortoise said, 'What is the matter? Why are you panting like that?'



'O elder brother, I am so tired that my life is leaving my body.'

'Where are you going, little sister?'

'I am searching for earth. Where can I find it?'

'Go and look for the Worm at the bottom of the ocean; it is he who has swallowed the earth. I will take you to the Lord of Iron, who will help you.'

So Tortoise took Crow to the Lord of Iron and he called the twelve brothers Loharsur, who worked in iron, the thirteen brothers Tamesur, who worked in copper, and the fourteen brothers Agyasur, who worked in fire, and they made a great iron cage with windows. Tortoise and Crow got into the cage, and the Lord of Iron lowered them down till they reached the bottom of the sea. He gave them another chain and said, 'When you're ready, pull this and I'll haul you up.'

Worm was sleeping: the cage landed near his head. Tortoise and Crow came out and woke him up. He was very angry. 'I've been sleeping for twelve years,' he shouted, 'and now you've woken me up. Well, I'm very hungry, for I've had no food all that time, so now I'm going to have a fine breakfast off the two of you.'

Tortoise got behind Crow when he heard that.
 'Whose daughter are you?' Worm asked then.
 'I am the daughter of God himself.'
 'Why have you come here?'
 'I have come to find the earth.'

'Did your father put the earth here so that you should come and look for it?'

When she heard that, Crow lost her temper and said, 'If you don't give me the earth I'll give you a proper beating.'

That frightened Worm, and he said, 'The earth isn't here, my daughter, it's over there, but it's guarded by an ogre who will burn you to ashes if you go near him.'

But Tortoise didn't believe this, and when he saw that Worm was afraid, he forgot to be afraid himself, and came out from behind Crow's back and jumped onto him and seized him by the neck.

'Give me the earth at once, or I'll cut off your head,' he shouted.

So he began to squeeze and squeeze. Worm wriggled and twisted this way and that, and screamed. 'My son, my son, wait a moment.' He began to vomit then. Twenty-one

times he vomited. Each time he brought up some earth, each time it was about the size of a berry.

His first vomit brought up Mother Earth; his second, yellow earth; his third, black earth; his fourth, sinful earth where a tiger can kill you; his fifth, arid earth where you sow but get no harvest; his sixth, unclean earth; his seventh, untouched earth; his eighth, earth white as milk; his ninth, the good earth; his tenth, the earth that quakes; his eleventh, a mixture of all kinds of earth; his twelfth, red earth; his thirteenth, naked earth; his fourteenth, white clay; his fifteenth, rocky earth, his sixteenth, red gravel earth; his seventeenth, sandy earth; his eighteenth, deaf earth; his nineteenth, fertile earth that gives grain; his twentieth, earth where nothing grows; his twenty-first, virgin earth.

Worm gave all this earth to Crow, and then Tortoise tugged at the chain and the Lord of Iron pulled them both up. Tortoise tied the earth round Crow's neck with a bit of rope, and she flew away, away, away; she nearly died of weariness; till at last she came home to God.

'Have you brought the earth, my daughter?' he asked when he saw her.

'Yes, father, I have.'

Then God undid the earth from her neck and put it in his lap. He called a young virgin to make a pot out of leaves, and he put the earth in it, and she churned it. For eight days and nine nights she churned till all was ready. Then God rolled the earth out like a great thin cake, and spread it on the face of the waters, where it grew and grew until it covered it entirely.

But it was not firm; whenever they tried to stand on it, it ran away; it was slippery as mud in the rains.

So at last God sent his daughter Crow to fetch Pawan Daseri the Wind-God and Bhimsen. The Wind, whom God has created from the breath of his mouth, came first, flying in great haste. He blew on the earth, he drove some of it up into the air, he mixed it all up, he blew till it began to be hard and firm. But the wind is blind: that is why he is always

knocking things over and banging up against people: so the work was not perfect. The earth was hard, but when they stood on one side, the other side tipped up.

Then came Bhimsen, that great giant, in one mighty stride he came, one foot was in his house, the other came to God. But he was very tired and said that he must have some food before anything else. So God gave him twenty-five sacks of rice and twelve sacks of lentils. He ate it all and said, 'This is nothing; give me more.' Then they gave him twelve sacks of gram. When he had eaten that also, he said to God, 'Old uncle, you've given me nothing to drink'.

'You must go and find some spirit,' said God.

'What is that?' asked Bhimsen.

'Go and see,' said God.

Bhimsen went to the forest and searched and searched. After a long time he came to a mahua tree: it was hollow and that hollow was full of spirit. All round on the branches birds were sitting who had been drinking it—green pigeons, blue jays, parrots, crows, mainas, every kind of bird. They were all nodding their heads. 'Why are they nodding their heads like that?' thought Bhimsen. He climbed the tree to see, and there the hollow was full of the spirit. Bhimsen dipped his hand in and sucked it.

'This is spirit! This is spirit!' he shouted, and began to drink. When he had a bellyful his head began to nod also. He sat down with the birds and they all nodded their heads together.

Then he filled twelve gourds full of the spirit and brought it back for God to drink. They sat down, God and Wind and Crow, and they drank the spirit out of leaf-cups. Then when their heads were nodding, Bhimsen got up and walked round the earth.

Where it was thin he put a mountain, where it was too heavy he made a valley. Where it slipped about, he put trees to hold it together. But even then the earth was not firm and steady. It still wobbled. It was so scattered and uneven that

it was like a broken spider's web.

Five years passed, then Nanga Baiga and his wife were born out of a crack in the ground. Nanga Baiga said to Mother Earth, 'Mother, where is my fiddle?'

She said, 'Child, you are yet but a navel and a cord; what need have you of a fiddle?'

But on that day Bamboo Maiden was born, and Nanga Baiga went to cut the bamboo, in one breath, above and below. He made his fiddle with his own hair for strings, and played it, and God's seat shook with the sound. Then God knew that the Baigas were born, and sent to call them, and his messenger found Nanga Baiga asleep in a winnowing-fan. Mother Earth said, 'Don't go, my son,' but the little boy, naked as a cow, took his fiddle and went. God said to him, 'Drive your nails into the earth to make it steady.' Nanga Baiga had no nails, so he cut off the little finger of his right hand and drove that into the ground. But God was not satisfied. 'I want strong pillars,' he said.

So Nanga Baiga called Agyasur, God of Fire, and worshipped him, and Agyasur blazed up with the great flames, and from the fire Blacksmith Agaria was born. Since he came from fire, he had no fear of it, and could beat the slag from the glowing iron with his hands. Agaria made twelve pillars of Virgin Iron and set them at the four corners of the world, and it became steady, and God sowed seed everywhere, and the earth was made.

The Sun and Moon

For our next story we will go right across India to the great mountains of the north-east frontier. The Sun and Moon are regarded as deities by many of the hill people and, rather curiously, the Sun is often supposed to be feminine and the Moon is her husband, as in the following

story told by the Minyongs living on the left bank of the River Siang.

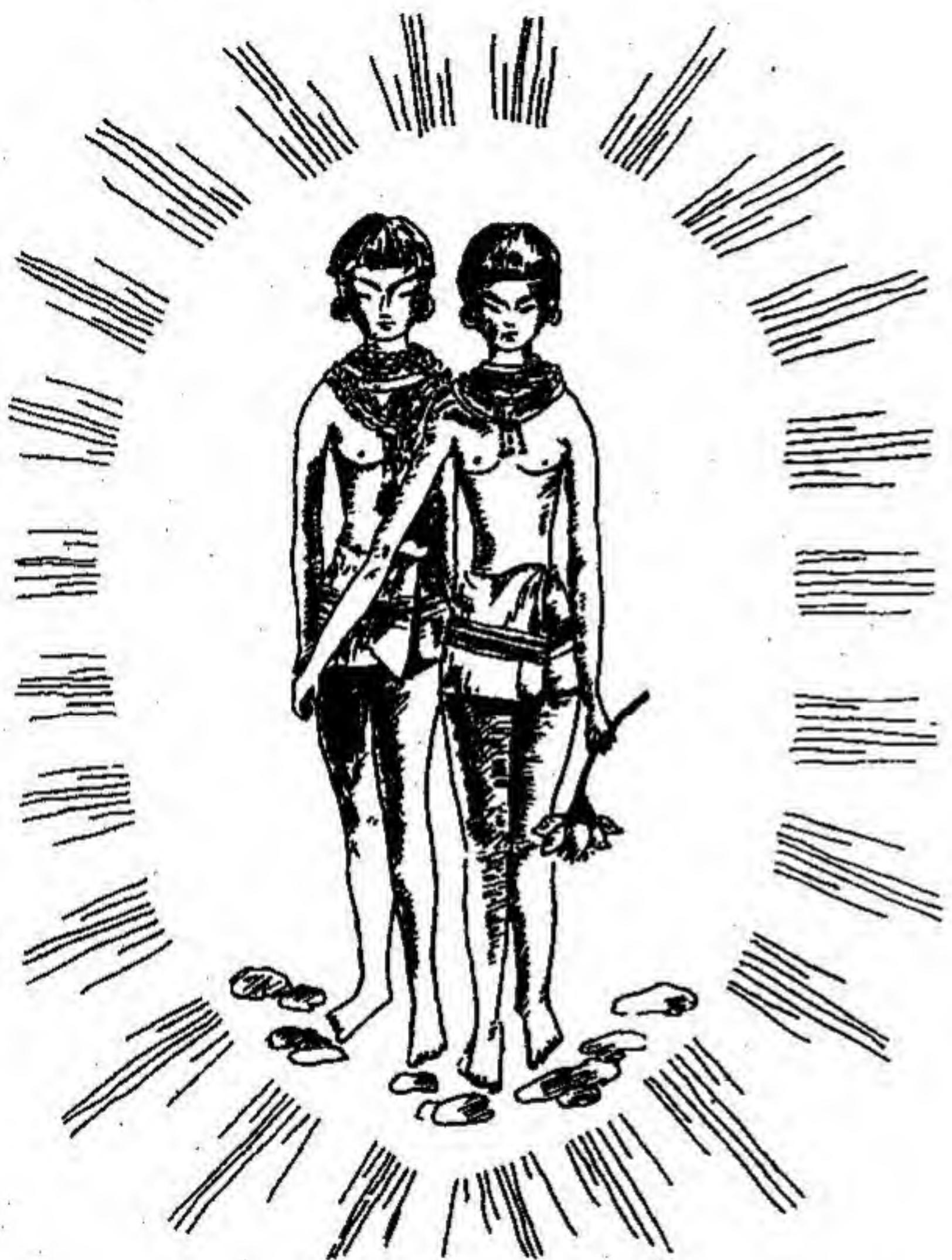
Earth is woman, Sky is man. They married, and when they came together, spirits, men and animals met in council to consider how they could save themselves from being crushed between them. Sedi-Diyor, one of the greatest of the spirits, caught hold of Sky and beat him so that he fled far up into the heavens leaving Earth behind. As he went away, Earth gave birth to two daughters. But she was so sad at losing her husband that she could not bear to look at them, and Sei-Diyor had to find a woman to nurse them.

When the little girls were old enough to walk, light began to shine from them, and day by day the light grew brighter. After a while the nurse died and Sedi-Diyor buried her in the ground. The children wept for her as for their mother: they wept so much that they died, and the light they gave died with them.

Now it was dark again, and spirits, men and animals were afraid. The spirits thought that the nurse must have stolen something from the children and that it was this that had made them weep so much. So they dug up her body to see what it was. They found that it had rotted away, all except the eyes. They saw the eyes great and shining in the darkness, and their own reflection was mirrored in them, which made them think the dead children were living there. They took them to a stream and washed them in the water for five days and five nights, and made them shine more brightly. But they could not remove the images looking back at them from the eyes.

The spirits sent for a carpenter and he cut the eyes open with great care and removed the reflections, which turned into living children. They called one girl Sedi-Irkong-Bomong and the other Sedi-Irkong-Bong, and kept them very carefully inside their house.

But one day, when they were grown up, the elder girl, Bomong, dressed herself in gaily-coloured clothes and many ornaments, and went out in her beauty to wander



through the world. As she came out of the house, there was light all round her, and it was day. She went across the hills and did not return.

After a long time, her sister Bong went to look for her, tracing the path by her footsteps. But wherever she went, she shone so brightly that she caused the rocks to break, the

trees to wither and men to faint in the heat.

Spirits, men and animals held yet another council and decided that the only thing to do was to kill one of the sisters. They were afraid to do such a thing and argued about it for a long time, but at last Frog went to sit by the path and waited bow in hand for the girl to come. When Bong came shining and lovely he shot her with an arrow in each side and she died. Then it was not so hot, the light was not so dazzling. The trees revived and men went again about their work.

But the girl's body lay where it had fallen. Then Rat came scampering along and found her: he dragged her corpse to Bomong on his back. On the way, he fell over and ever since the rat's legs have been crooked. But he got up and took the body to a river where Bomong was due to pass. When she saw her sister she wept for sorrow and fear that she herself would be killed. She took a path that no one knew and sat down, placing a big stone on her head. With the shadow of the stone the world became dark.

At this, spirits, men and animals were afraid and they went to search for light. For a long time they found nothing. Then they caught Rat, Wild Bird and Cock and sent them to find the missing girl.

Rat and Wild Bird went about their own business, but Cock searched patiently until at last he found Bomong and begged her to come back. 'No', she said, 'they killed my sister and they'll kill me. Tell them that I will only come if they make my sister alive.' Cock returned and told the others what the girl had said. They found a carpenter who fashioned Bong's body, making it small, so that it would shine gently. He put life into it and when Bomong heard that her sister was alive again, she threw the stone down from her head and stood up. The day returned and as the light blazed out, Cock cried 'Kokoko-Kokoko'; Wild Bird sang 'Pengo-pengo'; Rat squeaked 'Taktak-taktak'. For they were glad at the light and heat.

The Dancers in the Sky

The seven virgin daughters of Jogi Jhoria were gay and beautiful. One day, at the year's greatest festival, they danced with the other village maidens. Dancing, dancing, they were drunk with pleasure. Dancing, dancing, the girls, with boys at the drums, were carried into the sky, swept up as if a hawk had snatched them away. Dancing, dancing in the sky they went to the Cloud God who was so delighted when he saw their dance that he would not let them return to earth. He said to the girls, 'When I send down rain upon the earth, you must dance across the sky and the boys must



beat their drums.' He called the girls Lightning and the boys Thunder.

This tale comes from Orissa: another pretty idea is known in north-eastern India among the Noctes.

There are two brothers, of whom the elder lives on earth and the younger in the sky. From time to time the younger brother dances and throws showers of rain-drops down. Then he asks the lovely fair-coloured girls of earth whether they have ever had such beautiful beads to wear. Sometimes too he throws the lightning down and asks whether the earth-people possess such marvellous magic. Sometimes he beats his drum and when it thunders across the sky he asks the earth-people whether they have any music to match it.

The Mishmis are less romantic. They say that the clouds are the pigs of the air. There is a road of great chains tied across the sky and the cloud-pigs wander about on it. When two pigs meet, they fight; their bristles scrape against each other and lightning flashes round the world. The pigs grunt loudly as they fight and we hear the noise as thunder.

The Rainbow

There are four water-spirits: Lukarpo a white spirit, Lunakpu a black one, Lusirpu who is yellow, and Lumarpo who is red. They live in springs and wander across the sky, for ever seeking wives as lovely as themselves, and the rainbow is the path they make. When they cross it a little rain falls—this is the tea and rice-beer they drink to refresh themselves on their journey.

The Hungry Children

Long ago, two brothers and their wives were living in the Phong-Langra Mountains. They had many children, but no food. So one day the two families climbed high in the hills, but there too they found no food, and in despair the parents left their children and went away. The children lifted their faces to the sky and cried for hunger.

Far up among the clouds the gods Lujuphu and Jasuju had gathered a great quantity of cooked rice, and when they heard the children's cries they threw it down for them and it fell to the earth as snow.

The First Rivers

The Brahmaputra River is the sister of the Sun. The Sun is fortunate because he travels in the sky where there are no obstacles to make his path difficult and he can go about as he feels inclined. But at the beginning Brahmaputra found it very difficult to move about on earth. At that time she lived in Nimtubram, in a great lake at the very end and limit of the world. But in other parts of the world, there was no water and men and animals fainted for lack of it.

Worm was thirsty and came to drink. He dug a little channel and a trickle of water flowed down from it. Wild Cat saw it and tried to drink the water, but there was too little and it was too muddy. So he went to the Nimtubram Lake and made a big channel and, after drinking as much as he could, went away. Brahmaputra followed him, wandering about the country as a cat wanders.

But when the god Drakub saw what was happening, he came hastily to stop them. He brought a basket full of

earth and built a wall across the path. Another god, Chainye, heard about this and was angry that men should be deprived of the water they needed so badly. He went to Drakub and said, 'Brother, you are a wonderful worker. You made the world and now you want to stop Brahmaputra from wandering about. All your work is good, but I have bad news for you. In your own home your wife has died. Go back and see to it.'

Drakub said, 'What does it matter? If one wife dies, I can get a thousand more.'

Chainye, who had hoped to break down the dam when Drakub was away, had to go home disappointed.

But he tried again and this time he said, 'I have more bad news for you. Your son is dead.'

Drakub replied, 'What does it matter? If one son dies, I can get a thousand more.'

Chainye again went away disappointed.

But he was so worried about men (for, as he said, 'How can they live without water?') that he tried yet again and this time he said, 'Your wife is dead, and I agree that it does not matter. Your son is dead, and that doesn't matter either. But now your mother is dying.'

Drakub said to himself, 'It is true that I can get plenty of other wives, and sons too, but I can never get another mother. I must go and see her.' So he stopped his work and went away.

At once Chainye broke down the dam and Brahmapura continued on her way wandering through the mountains, until she came down into the plains of Assam. Wherever she brought her waters, men and animals revived.

This tale is told by the Idu Mishmis of north-eastern India. Another story about rivers comes from the Kamars of Orissa.

Long long ago lived a man and woman and their only son. One day this boy fell ill and the parents were in a panic, not knowing what to do. They ran to and fro, calling a magician there, fetching medicine here, offering goats and

pigeons to the gods. At last the old man discovered a very famous magician and persuaded him to go with him to his house.

But as they were on the way, the boy's life left his body. His mother was all alone and she began to weep loudly. Poor thing! It was her only son. She cried so much that the tears from her eyes were like a river and in fact when they fell to the ground they actually became a river. And as the woman continued to weep, it came down in flood.

And when the father with the magician drew near to the house they found their passage barred by the rushing torrent. The old man was afraid. 'There was no river here when I left,' he thought. 'Something must have happened,' and he said to the magician, 'Go home; there is no longer any need for you here.'

At last the mother ceased her lamentations and the flood went down and her husband was able to cross the river and reach his house. There he found his son dead. He said to his wife, 'Had you not wept so much I could have



brought the magician and he might have saved our son.'

But she said, 'I wept to create rivers in the world.'

He was angry at that and exclaimed, 'Do you mean to tell me you let our son die in order to make a river?'

He sacrificed the woman to the river and then plunged into its waters himself and was drowned. Thus they all died, but the world was refreshed with living, running water.

Why the Earth Quakes

When Bhima Raja was living on Mahullakta Hill, he set up a Government and, calling people from each village in turn, forced them to work in the palace. From every house one man had to go to perform this duty. The Raja also decided that every household should pay taxes twice in the year. He refused to accept money from his subjects' hands, but gave an order that they should load hares with little sacks of coins and drive them to the palace.

The people, therefore, had to keep small hares in their houses and fatten and tame them. When the hares grew big, four or six villages would combine to load one of them. But as they always overloaded it, it could not run and took a month to do a day's journey. The villagers found this very tedious and at last decided to end it by killing the Raja. 'Once we've killed him, we'll all be happy,' they said. They took their weapons and approached the Palace.

Now the Raja had two sons, both of whom were still young. When the rebels arrived, the Raja was in his court and they entered and killed him there. When the Rani heard the news, she hid her sons in a cellar and locked the door. She put her gold and silver ornaments in a little box and hid it in a well, and then she and her attendant women leapt into the well and were drowned. Some of the Raja's

chaprasis and clerks were killed, some hid and some escaped. The rebels tried to find the children, but they were too well hidden.

Now the two children tried to climb up to revenge the death of their parents. They banged and banged on the door of the cellar, but no one heard them. But they shook the door and this shook the whole world. And still from time to time they shake the door and the earth quakes.

THE FIRST MEN

How Men Lost Their Tails

The hill people have many theories about the origin of mankind. Some say that God fashioned the first people from clay with his own hands; some say that they were hatched from enormous eggs. They emerged from a crack in the ground, from the womb of Mother Earth; they were born of a goddess; they were even born of animals.

But all agree that, however they came into being, they were very different from what they are today, as the following stories show. According to the Saoras of Orissa, for example, they originally had tails.

In the days when men had tails they used to sweep the ground with them. But as the population increased, they got in the way and at marriages and funerals, people used to tread on each others' tails and trip over and this caused a lot of amusement.

One day the Great God Kittung went to a bazaar and found it crowded as usual. As he went round looking at the stalls and searching for some good tobacco, someone trod on his tail and he went sprawling on the ground. Unfortunately he fell against a stone and two of his front teeth were knocked out. The whole bazaar roared with laughter and Kittung lost his temper. He picked up his own tail, pulled it out and threw it away. When the other tails saw this, they were frightened and they all of their own accord detached themselves from their bodies and ran away. Kittung's own tail became the sago palm and the rest turned into the grass which is now used for making brooms.



The Little Men

The Murias of Bastar say that at first people were tiny creatures.

When this world was made originally there was neither Sun nor Moon, and the clouds and the earth were like husband and wife, they were so close together. Men had to be very small, for they had to move between them. They ploughed with rats and if they wanted to pick brinjals they had to reach up for them as though they were getting mangoes from a tree. As they walked about they used to knock their heads against the clouds.

After they had put up with this for a long time, they all got very tired of it. One day an old woman was sweeping the garden round her tree and hit her broom on the sky. She really lost her temper and gave the sky a mighty shove and away it went, to where it is today.

After that there was plenty of room for people to grow to their proper size.

The First Eyes

In the days before men got their eyes, they used to tumble over each other like puppies and of course could not do any work and so did not live very long. One day God said to himself, 'I have created a whole world for my children; I wonder how they are getting on.' He came, carrying a cane in his hand, to the Middle World to see. When he saw men tumbling about and wasting their time he was distressed. 'They are like this,' he thought, 'because they have no eyes.'

So he went to a stream, and on the bank found a large crab with enormous eyes. 'This is just what I want,' he thought. He tried to catch the crab but it bit him and retreated into its hole, withdrawing its eyes into its body.

God went on to the forest. On a tree he saw a large owl with enormous eyes. 'This is just what I want,' he thought. He tried to catch the owl but it tore at his face with its claws, and flew away, withdrawing its eyes into its body.

God was tired now and sat down under a fig tree. On one of the branches a crow was busy eating plums. Some of the stones fell down on the ground in front of God as he rested. He said to himself, 'These would make good eyes'. He picked them up and fitted them into the faces of men and after that they could see.

But even after getting eyes, people had no eye-lids or lashes, and had to sleep with their eyes open. It was quite impossible to tell whether a man was awake or asleep when he was lying down.

One night an old man and his wife, with their son and daughter, were lying asleep in their hut, when the three Water Sisters came to visit them. They saw the sleeping people with their eyes wide open and could not understand why they did not get up to greet them. In the morning, however, they saw that their eyes were just the same by day as when they were asleep at night. The Sisters thought that this was very strange, especially when they looked at their own eyes in the clear water of a pond and saw that they themselves had lids and lashes. So they went to the forest and caught a peacock. With the delicate end-feathers of the tail, they made lashes and fixed them on the eyes of the old man and woman and their son and daughter. Then their lids moved up and down, and when they slept they lay with their eyes shut.

How People Began to Talk

Originally men had no tongues, and of course they could not talk. God wondered how to remedy this. He thought and thought but could not invent anything. One day he went to bathe and afterwards sat on a rock to dry himself in the sun. Below the rock was a hole in which lived a frog and his mate.



The frog said to his mate, 'Tomorrow it's going to rain. There will be a tremendous flood which will carry away our children.'

When God heard that the frogs were actually talking,

he caught them and examined their tongues. Here was just what he had been looking for. He cut them out and stuck them into the mouths of men and after that they were able to talk.

Big Ears

Once upon a time, people had very big ears. They were so big that a man could sleep on one of them as a mattress and cover himself with the other as a blanket.

One day when God was out hunting, he mistook a man for an animal (for the great ears covered his whole body) and killed him with his arrow. When he saw the body and realized he had killed a man, he was very sorry. He cut off the ears to prevent such mistakes in future and restored the man to life.

Since then our ears have been small as they are today.

The Bearded Women

Long ago women had beards and moustaches. In those days Tiger was king of the forest. He had a son, and when the boy grew up, his father went everywhere looking for a daughter-in-law but could not find anyone pretty enough.

Tiger said to all the forest-creatures, 'I will marry my son to any pretty girl you can find.'

When the animals heard this each thought, 'If only my daughter could be Tiger's daughter-in-law and be called queen of the forest!'

She-goat was living with an old woman as her servant.

When she heard Tiger's proclamation she said to her mistress, 'Give me your hair and then I will look so pretty that Tiger will give his son to me and after two or four days I will come back and return everything to you.'

The woman pulled off her beard and moustache and put them on She-goat. But she went away to the jungle and never returned, and since then the faces of women have been free of hair.

When Life was Dull

At the beginning, say the Konds of Orissa, before the sensation of tickling had been made, boys and girls were very solemn and proper. They used to sit together discussing their debts and the state of the crops, but they never giggled or flirted with each other.

When the goddess Nirantali saw this, she thought it all very tedious. 'There must be some means of bringing fun into the world,' she said. She went accordingly to the forest and got some wax and made Tickle Bug. She came home and sent him into the tummies of the boys and girls.

'Once you're inside,' she told him, 'live under the chin, in the armpits in the ribs, and whenever anyone touches the skin outside, run about inside, and they will have a pleasant feeling and want to laugh.'

Tickle Bug went into the bodies of the boys and girls. Eight days afterwards Nirantali went to see how they were getting on. No more talk now of debts and agriculture. There was nothing but laughter and love and playing about. Nirantali put her hand on a girl's waist and she at once began to giggle.

This was the beginning of a new kind of happiness for people.

The Brave Children

And finally here is a story about the strange, exciting days at the beginning of the world, when gods and men, animals and ogres lived and talked together. It is told by the Akas, who live in the hills to the west of the North-East Frontier Agency.



Long ago there was a man called Awa. His body was like a bear's, covered with thick hair, yet in spite of this he managed to marry Jusam, the Sun's beautiful daughter. At the wedding the Sun gave her a hen's feather and some pig'

bristles. Awa took his bride home and in due time she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. They called the boy Sibji-Sao and the girl Sibjim-Sam.

When the children grew up a little, they both fell ill. The father sent for the priest who said that if Awa sacrificed a fowl and a pig the children would recover, but he insisted that the fowl and the pig must be house animals and not caught in the jungle.

Unfortunately Awa had no pigs or fowls in the house and did not know where to get any. When his wife saw him looking so distracted she asked him what was the matter and he told her what the priest had said. Jusam replied, 'Don't worry. Make a bamboo cage and a trough.'

Awa accordingly made a bamboo cage and put a wooden trough beside it. When everything was ready, Jusam sat down in front of the cage and, taking one of the feathers she had from her father's house, blew on it and a cock and hen immediately appeared inside the cage. Then she sat in front of the trough and, taking some of the bristles that she had from her father's house, blew on them, and a pig and a sow immediately appeared before the trough.

At once the pigs and the fowls began to weep. Jusam tried to console them by offering them milk from her own breast, but they would not take it and she said, 'Since you won't drink my milk, what are you crying about?'

The pigs and fowls replied, 'Because we're very hungry.'

Jusam said, 'I've got nothing else to give you; that's why I offered you my own milk.'

The fowls and pigs said, 'No, whatever we do, we're not going to drink your milk, for then you will never want to kill us-and we have been made to be killed.'

Jusam said, 'Well, that's all I've got to give you; if you don't want to have it, eat anything you can find.'

Soon afterwards the hen laid her eggs and hatched out chickens, and the sow had a litter. Awa took a chicken and a pig and sacrificed them for his children, who soon were

well again.

In this way Awa and his wife got pigs and fowls in their house, but they had no seed. So Jusam said to her husband, 'Go to my father's house, for he has a great store of grain, and if you ask him nicely he will give you some of it.'

Awa replied, 'But I don't know the way to your father's house.'

Jusam, therefore, went with him part of the way as his guide. Then she said, 'Now you can follow the path, but presently you will come to a point where it divides in two. Be sure you take the right-hand path and not the left. If you go to the left, you will find yourself in all sorts of trouble.'

Jusam then returned home and Awa went on his way.

Presently Awa came to the point where the path divided in two and, remembering what his wife had said, went to the right, but there were so many thorns and pitfalls that he thought that she must have made a mistake, and turned back and went to the left.

He walked a long way until at last he came to a cave where a demon, black, with only one eye, one arm and one breast, was sitting beside a great fire. When the demon saw him, she threw a burning bit of wood at him and turned him into a dog.

Poor Awa slunk back to his house but did not dare go in; he just lay down in front of the door, placing his front paws together on the threshold. Presently the two children Sibji-Sao and Sibjim-Sam came out; they saw him lying there, and ran back to their mother and said, 'There is an extraordinary creature sitting at the door.'

Their mother came out hurriedly and, when she saw the dog, realized at once that it was her foolish husband who had taken the wrong path, and told her children, 'This is your father.'

But they replied, 'How can this be our father who is a great big man?'

Jusam said, 'If you don't believe me, spit on your

hands and offer them to this creature. If he licks them, it will mean he is your father; if he doesn't, then he is something else.'

So the children spat on their hands and held them out to the dog who immediately licked them and Jusam said, 'There, don't you see? He really is your father.'

The children said, 'Yes, you are right, he is our father.'

Jusam explained things to them saying, 'What happened was that your father was going to my father's house to get seed but he took the wrong path and has been turned into a dog. Now how I am to feed you both I really do not know. The only thing for me to do is to go myself to my father. I'll send you some seed and you'll be able to make fields and cultivate them and in that way get some food to eat.' But the children began to cry and would not let their mother go and she had to wait till evening. After supper she put the children to sleep by the fire and then went secretly to her father.

When Jusam left the house, the evil spirits of the forest, seeing that the two children were alone, gathered round to devour them. But when the dog saw them coming he barked loudly and drove them away. In the morning when the children found their mother gone, they cried and said to each other, 'Come along, let's follow mother wherever she has gone.' The dog went ahead to guide them and the children followed him. He went as far as he knew the way, and then stood still. The children sat down to rest and the dog thought to himself, 'Let them sleep for a bit, while I go and try to find the right path.'

When the evil spirits of the forest saw the children alone, they gathered round to devour them and the children woke up and ran for their lives.

As they were running along they met a bear who asked them, 'What's the matter? Why are you running so fast?' They replied that the evil spirits of the forest were chasing them. The bear said, 'Don't be so frightened. I will save you.' He took them on his back and climbed up a high tree

and, making them sit on a branch at the top, came down and scraped off the bark so that the spirits could not climb up. Having done this, the bear went away.

After the bear had gone, the evil spirits of the forest came to the tree and tried to climb up, but the trunk was too smooth for them. So they began to cut it down with their teeth.

When they saw what was happening, the children said to the tree, 'When you fall, fall towards the open country.'

But the spirits of the forest cried, 'Fall towards the mountains.'

At last when the tree did fall, it came down in the direction of the open country. It did this out of mercy for the children, for the evil spirits could not go toward the open country.

The children were safe for the moment but they were very lonely and said to one another, 'Somehow or other we must find our mother.' As they were wondering what to do, a vulture flew down and asked them what the matter was.

When they told him, he said, 'It is my duty to search every day for dead bodies and take their blood to the house of the Sun.'

The children said, 'But that's just where we want to go; our mother is the daughter of the Sun, so when you go take us with you.'

The vulture replied, 'You are too heavy for me to lift both of you at the same time. I can only take one of you.'

So he took Sibjim-Sam on his back and flew to the house of the Sun. When Jusam saw her daughter, she was very pleased and gave her a big basket of seed. She tied a rope to her hair and let her down to the earth, right in front of the house. When the girl reached home, she cooked some of the seed and made it into beer, and then sat outside watching the road until her brother should return.

Sibji-Sao remained standing where he was, for he did not know where to go, for a long time. But as he was wondering what he could do, his father who had been



searching everywhere for the children found him. When he saw Sibji-Sao he jumped on him, licking his face, barking and wagging his tail and then led him back home. When they reached the house Sibjim-Sam made supper for them and gave them lots of beer, for they were all very happy at meeting again.

DISCOVERIES

How to Build a House

The hill people have many stories of how their ancestors lived long ago. Some made their houses in caves; some lived like birds in trees; others made little huts of grass and leaves. The Saora of Orissa, for example, describe what it was like in those days.

At first men lived under trees: they were small then, only about two feet high. In the rains they found life very troublesome and decided to dig holes in the ground and live like hares. But the roofs fell in and buried many of them alive, and the number of people in the world grew smaller and smaller.

After a long time a man called Jangu Saora got the idea of building a house. He used the leaves of the toddy palm and made a house like an umbrella, with a circular roof on a single pillar, but no walls. In such houses men lived for many years and the Saoras make little temples like this even today. Later, they made proper homes of wood or mud, which were dry and warm. At last, in order to be near each other, they made houses in villages.

The Singphos of north-eastern India have a more elaborate tale of how the first men were taught by various animals to build their houses.

In the days when men were living in caves and under trees, two friends, Kindru-Lalim and Kincha Lali-Dam, decided to build a house for themselves. Unhappily they had no idea of what to do, so they went to the forest to consult the animals.

The first animal they met was Elephant and they said to him, 'We want to build a house; can you tell us how to do it?'

Elephant said, 'Cut wooden pillars strong and thick as my legs.'

'What should we do then?' they asked.

Elephant replied, 'I haven't the least idea.'

The two friends went on and met Snake and to him they said, 'We want to build a house; can you tell us how to do it? Elephant has told us to make pillars strong and thick as his own legs, but that's all he could say.'

Snake said, 'Cut poles as long and thin as myself.'

They asked, 'What should we do then?'

Snake replied, 'I haven't the least idea.'

They went on and found She-buffalo standing by the carcass of her dead husband. Other animals had eaten all the skin and flesh and only the bones remained.

The two men said to She-buffalo, 'We want to build a house; can you tell us how to do it? Elephant has told us to make pillars strong and thick as his own legs; Snake has told us to cut long poles thin as himself, but what should we do now?'

She-buffalo showed them her dead husband and said, 'Put cross-poles and make a roof like the bones of this skeleton.'

'What should we do then?' asked the men.

She-buffalo replied, 'I haven't the least idea.'

They went on and met Fish and said to him, 'We want to build a house. Elephant has told us to make pillars strong and thick as his own legs; Snake has told us to cut long poles thin as himself; She-buffalo has shown us how to arrange them. What should we do now?'

Fish replied, 'Look at the scales on my back. Get plenty of leaves and put them on the roof, one above the other like my scales.'

When they heard this, the friends went home and built the first house.

Hammer and Tongs

There was a craftsman named Intupwa who tried to cut wood with sharp stones. This did not work very well and he went out to find something better.

He had dreamt of something called iron and he began by asking the trees where he could find it. But the trees replied, 'If we tell you, you'll make an axe and cut us down.'

Then he asked the grass and the grass replied, 'If I tell you, you'll make an axe and cut us down.'

He asked the wild animals and they replied, 'If we tell you, you'll make arrows and kill us.'

At last he asked the water and the water said, 'Go to Numrang-Ningpu and you'll find iron there.'

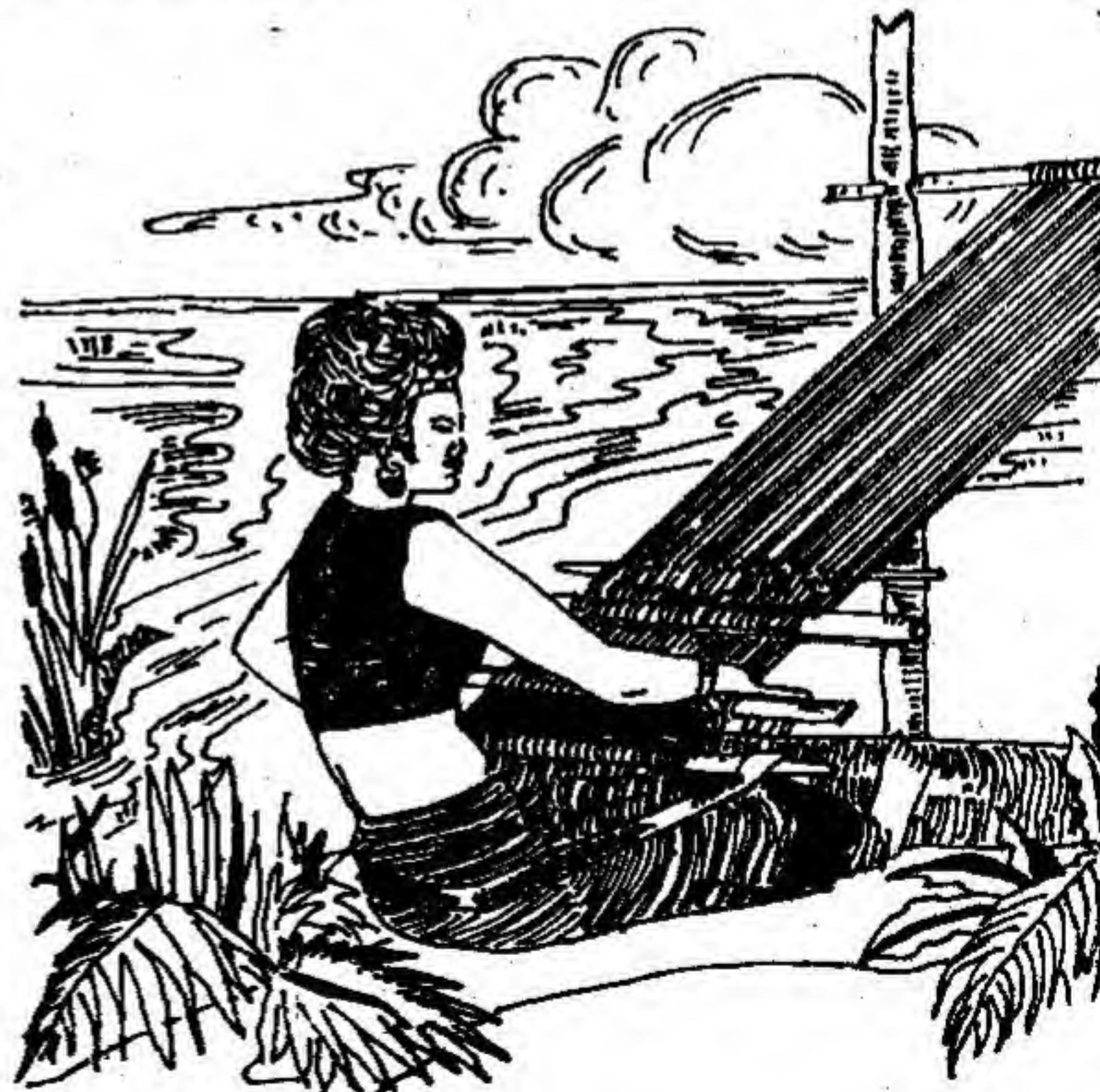
Intupwa went to the place but could not find any iron. But there was a goddess living there and that very night she gave birth to a child as she slept.

This child was red as fire when he was born, but as he cooled, he became black as iron. Intupwa chopped a small bit off him and took it home. The child then broke into a hundred pieces, and a stream carried them away and scattered them about the world, and afterwards there was iron everywhere.

But Intupwa did not know how to work the iron he had found. As he was sitting outside his house wondering what to do, Elephant came by. When he saw Elephant's feet crushing everything beneath them, he learnt to make a hammer out of stone. Then he heated the iron, but he had no tongs to hold it with. He tried and tried till he got very thirsty and went down to a stream to drink. As he was drinking, Crab caught him by the hand. He jumped with pain but when he saw the claws, he realised that here was what he had been looking for. He made a pair of tongs and was soon turning out axes, knives and arrow-heads.

How Clothes Began

Originally people did not wear clothes, for they did not know how to weave. The first weaver was a girl named Hambrumai, who was taught the art by the god Matai. She sat by the river and watched the waves and ripples on its surface and imitated them in her designs. She lay in the forest looking up at the patterns woven by the branches of trees, the leaves of the bamboo; she saw ferns and plants and flowers, and from these things learnt other designs. Her work was as beautiful as her body and many young men desired to marry her.



But one day Hairum the Porcupine saw her cloth and came to steal it from her cave. The entrance was too small for him, so he pushed the rock into the river and the girl was crushed beneath it. Her loom was broken to pieces and carried down by the stream to the plains and the people there found them and learnt to weave. The designs turned into butterflies, and in the markings on their wings you can still see today the patterns she made.

This story is told by the Mishmis of north-eastern India; they have another which is a little different.

In the Khamlang River lived a fish called Hambru; she had flowers on her body, and with her was a snake of three colours, red white and blue—these colours are reflected in the clouds.

There was an orphan boy called Kowonsa, who was very fond of fishing, but had to work so hard in the fields that he had little opportunity for it. But one day he set his traps in a stream saying, 'If it is my destiny to get any fish, they will come to me of their own accord.' The next morning he found two hambru fish, one large and one small, in his trap and knew that he was favoured by the gods.

Kowonsa put the small fish on the fire and roasted and ate it. But the big fish was so pretty that he hid her in a gourd and kept her in house. The next day when he returned from work he found his little hut filled with pretty cloth patterned with the scales of a fish and the markings of a snake. He was surprised and rather frightened at this, for he had never seen cloth before and no one knew what it was. This went on for some time; he fed his fish every day, went out to work and when he returned found more and more cloth in the house. One day he hid outside and presently, peeping in, saw the fish come out of the gourd and turn into a girl with long hair, carrying a loom on which she wove many pieces of cloth in a very short time.

He went in quickly and caught hold of her and said, 'Who are you, and what is your clan?'

Kowonsa took her as his wife and she taught all the

women of that place how to weave. When they asked her how she herself had learnt the patterns, she said, 'When I was a fish I looked at the snake in the river and copied the marks on his body, and I followed his colours reflected in the clouds.' Kowonsa put some of the cloth out in the sun and the wind blew it away to other villages and the people there also learnt to weave, and gradually the art spread throughout the world.

The Discovery of Fire

In the days before people knew the use of fire, Cat and Bear were married, and all the animals in the world came to the wedding. There was a fine feast, but of course nothing was cooked, and the guests grumbled, saying, 'We're not going to eat this raw meat. We want something tasty. What about getting some fire?'

Panther said to Hyena, 'You go and fetch it.'

Hyena retorted, 'No, you get it.'

Leopard said, 'No, someone very strong should get it.'

At last Tiger said, 'Very well, I'll get it.' And he went off to try and find some fire.

Now Firefly had collected all the fire in the world in her tail and was sitting on it. When Tiger found this out, he began to fight for it, but Firefly turned him into a leaf and the wind blew it into the air. But the leaf called on the name of the wizard Jhinjha Guru and became a tiger again.

Tiger returned to the fight and now Firefly turned him into dust and the wind blew it about. The dust called on the name of the wizard Bhinjha Guru and became a tiger again.

Tiger returned to the fight, and this time got hold of Firefly and was about to crush her in his jaws when she said, 'Let me go and I'll let you have it.' Tiger let her go and she cut her tail and let a drop of blood fall on a leaf. Tiger ran



off with it and when he reached home, made a bundle of spear-grass and let the blood fall on it, whereupon it burst into flames. The wedding-feast started all over again; the meat was roasted, and now guests had no cause for complaint.

One day while Cat was wandering about, he came to a village. He saw a house and wondered what it was. He went in and there was a pot of milk. He drank some but did not like the taste. 'It ought to be cooked as at home,' he thought. He went back, got a bit of fire in a stick, tied it round his neck, and lit a fire and so boiled the milk. But the people came home and Cat ran away. They drank the boiled milk

and liked it, and since then men have cooked their food.

There are many other stories about the discovery of fire: here is one of them from Kawardha in Central India.

When men were first born they did not know how to cook or how to bathe or how to wear clothes. Their nails grew very long, for they had no idea of cutting them. They had no houses or villages but five or ten people would gather together and live under trees or in caves.

One year the bamboo disease came and the bamboos withered directly they flowered. It was the very hot weather just before the rains. The wind blew the dry bamboos to and fro, and as they rubbed together, fire came from them. The whole jungle was nothing but dry wood and it was soon in flames. When the fire died down, the long-nailed men came to the jungle and found many animals lying roasted in the ashes. One of them said, 'What is this?' He touched the roasted body with his finger and it went into the hot flesh and was burnt. He quickly pulled it away and put it in his mouth. 'It smells very good,' he said to himself, 'and what a delicious taste! This is the way to eat.' He forgot his pain in his excitement, and called his friends and they had a great feast on the roasted bodies of the animals.

The next day they went to hunt and killed a hare. Now they no longer would tolerate raw flesh and tried to roast it. They tied it with a barkrope and made a tripod to hang it over the fire. But when the fire blazed up the rope was burnt and the hare fell into the flames. Only the hair was burnt off but the flesh was not cooked. However they were hungry and ate it.

Next day the long-nailed men killed a deer. First they skinned it then they cut up the flesh into the little pieces, wrapped them in the skin and put it into the fire to cook. This time the meat was well cooked and everyone was pleased. Later, they tried cooking in leaves and it was quite a success.

But still the long-nailed men had no vessels to cook in and they could not boil things in water. As they went about

during the rains they noticed how the mud stuck to their feet and filled up the gaps between their toes and that when they came home and sat by the fire to warm themselves, the mud hardened. One day a man thought, 'If the earth hardens like this, why not make something with it?' He made a pot and, after drying it in the sun, put water and meat into it and set it above a hearth of three stones. But when he lit the fire the pot broke and the water poured out and extinguished the fire. Then he saw that the heat of the sun was not sufficient. 'If we are to cook on fire, we must make the pot with fire.' So he dried the pot in the fire, and this time it did not break. Since then men have made pots and have used fire to cook their food.

Tobacco

There was a Raja who had only one daughter, but unhappily the poor girl was dwarfish, cross-eyed, covered with sores and had a deformed arm. When she grew up, her father took rupees in his hand and went to find her a husband. Many young men came to see her, but she was so ugly that when they saw her they lost their power of speech and ran away silent.

As she grew older the girl saw how happily the rest of the world was living, for all were in pairs, ants, rats, birds, cattle, men and women. The Raja tried and tried to find a mate for her, but not a boy was ready. When the girl saw this she was very sad. She went to her father and said, 'No one will marry me. I don't want to go on living,' and she lay down and died then and there.

The Raja decorated her body and prepared to bury it. But the neighbours said he should burn it. So he made a great pyre and burnt his daughter's poor ugly body and soon there was nothing left except a little bit of bone from her back.

The girl's soul went to the Great God who was well pleased at seeing her. 'Ask for anything you want,' he said.

The girl replied, 'I was very unhappy in my lifetime for no one desired me. Now make me into something that the whole world will love.'

'Very well' said Mahapurub and sent the soul back to the pyre and into the little bit of bone. In due time this grew up as a tobacco plant.



A goat-herd passed that way and saw the plant. 'This looks fresh and good,' he thought. He broke off a leaf and smelt it. It was a good smell. He got the seeds and sowed them till he had many plants. He used to smell the leaves. The one day he put the leaf in his mouth and chewed it, and

found it extremely pleasant. The he began to chew it everyday and presently discovered that if it was burnt in a pipe or rolled into a sort of tube, it was even better. Naturally he shared this new pleasure with his friends and they too got drunk on the fragrant smoke. They took seeds from him, and gradually tobacco spread over the world till men now say, 'There is no difference between tobacco and a wife: we love them equally.'

The ugly girl is happy now, for all wise men love her and no one goes to his work without first kissing her in his pipe.

The First Dancers

Men first began to dance on the Hill of Peacocks. For here the peacocks, in all their finery, used to dance before their mates. One day a party of Gonds were returning from the forest and saw the dance and they were so pleased and excited that they joined the birds and all danced together. When the Gonds had learnt the steps, they went home and taught them to their friends.

There was a tall date-palm on the hill and the peacocks used to dance round it. As the peacock has a tuft on its head and a fine tail, the Gonds too put tufts in their turbans and decorations on their bodies. As the peacock dances looking back at its own beauty, so the Gonds dance, looking back at their shadows. The first song they sang was:

Under the palm tree the peacock dances;
It has taken birth, my long-tailed peacock.

But when the Gonds had learnt everything, the peacocks themselves stopped dancing with them, and said to them, 'Make tufts of our tails and put them in your turbans and your dance will never go wrong.' They pulled out many feathers from their tails and gave them to the Gonds who have used them ever since.

THE TALKING ANIMALS

The First Monkeys

All over the hills and forests of India there is a belief that a monkey descended from men, not that men descended from monkeys, and there are many stories describing how this happened. Here is one of them, told by the Juangs of Orissa, people who once used to dress in leaves.

Formerly monkeys were men. One day they went to the jungle and cut down trees to make a clearing for cultivation according to their old custom. When the shrubs and branches were dry they brought fire to set them alight but they would not catch. They piled up the branches and dry leaves; they brought fire from the headman's house, from the priest's house, from the magician's house, from the house of the village watchman. But the wood would not catch fire. Their hands were sore, their faces running with sweat. Their moustaches and beards were burnt, but their clearing was not burnt. They said to each other, 'Now all we'll get is a scolding from our wives.' And so they did, but they tied bits of wood to their backs and started to jump about shouting, 'Hoop-hoop hoop-hoop' to divert the angry women. But the bits of wood turned into tails and the dirt and sweat into hair all over their bodies. Now they were monkeys and they went to live on fruit in the jungle.

And there is another story, told by the Gadabas, about how monkeys behaved in the old days.

Twelve boys and twelve girls lived in a certain village. They were crazy about dancing. One evening, while they

were dancing, a monkey dressed in a coat and turban came and sat on a stone near by. He had a fiddle and played it so well that no one realized he was a monkey and the girls danced their best for him.

This happened night after night, and soon all the girls were in love with the monkey who played so beautifully.



One girl gave him a ring, another brought him food, a third refreshed him with rice-beer.

The boys naturally did not like this and said to each other, 'Nobody seems to know this fellow; where does he come from? Who is he?' One night they watched very carefully. The monkey's tail stuck out behind, and up till then they had all thought it was a stick he was carrying. But that night the boys saw what it was. 'It's only a monkey,' they whispered. They did nothing then, but went on with the dance as usual, and when it was over went to their dormitory and the monkey went to his tree.

But next day the boys put wood round the stone where the monkey always sat and set fire to it, and when it was very hot they cleaned it and sat down on the ground beside it and began to sing. Presently along came the monkey with his fiddle and sat down as usual on his stone. It was so hot that it burnt the skin off his behind and he ran away screaming with pain.

The boys never stopped laughing at the girls who had given monkey a ring, and food, and rice-beer, and ever since the monkey has had a red bottom.

The Frog and the Monkey

Long ago a Raja had a frog and a monkey as his servants, for in those days animals could talk like human beings. Now the monkey was deceitful and ambitious and plotted to kill the Raja and reign in his place. He was very conceited and when the Raja gave him work to do, he never did it properly.

One day the Raja sent the frog to get him fish and the monkey to get him some sweet fruits. The monkey went to the forest, but ate every fruit he picked and when his belly was full he lay down and slept. In the evening he woke up

and was rather frightened, for he thought that the Raja would beat him for not bringing any fruit. So he covered himself with mud and hurried home. On the way he met the frog who was carrying a heavy load of fish.

When the monkey saw that the frog was bringing home so much and he himself had nothing, he was still more disturbed, for the thought that the Raja might promote the frog above him. So he threw the frog with his fish into a stream and said to him, 'You had better tell the Raja that you couldn't catch any fish and that is why you have come home without anything. After all why do you bother about this fellow? One day I am going to kill him and when I myself am Raja, I will give you a good job with very little work to do.'

The monkey and the frog went to the Raja and told him that they had not been able to get him anything, either fruit or fish. The monkey said, 'I personally searched everywhere and climbed a hundred trees until I fell down, as you can see from my whole body being covered with mud and dust. What could I do? There was nothing to get. But look at this frog. All day long he has been bathing in the stream and hasn't even tried to catch any fish. Had he really tried he wouldn't be as clean as he is now.'

The Raja saw the monkey dirty and dishevelled and the frog clean and shining. This made him very angry and he beat the frog on the head crying, 'Did you go to fish or to bathe? This is why even now the top of the frog's head is flat.'

The frog was very angry and told the Raja all that the monkey had said. Then he went in a huff out of the house to the river and has lived there ever since.

At that time monkeys had no tails. One day the monkey went to the forest and collected all his relatives. He armed them with bows and arrows and made arrangements to attack the palace and kill the Raja.

But when the Raja heard what they were planning, he quickly made a black paste and coloured his face with it and

then sat quietly waiting for his enemies to come.

At first the monkey came by himself, leaving his army hiding in the trees outside. When he saw the decorations on the Raja's face he was very pleased and said, 'Where did you get that paste? I would like to have some for myself.'

The Raja said, 'I went to a hollow tree and got my servants to put me inside. They collected a lot of wood and set fire to it and the smoke made my face black. If you would like to look as nice as I do, then collect plenty of wood and take it to the hollow tree.'

The monkey went out and called his relatives and they collected a lot of wood and piled it round the hollow tree. Then the Raja tied each monkey to his fellow with a rope round the waist and sent them into the hollow of the tree. When they were all inside, he set fire to the wood. Very soon the monkeys began to scream, 'Let us out, let us out. We are quite black enough.' But the Raja piled up more and more wood until they were burnt to death.

But high up in the tree a she-monkey managed to escape, for the rope that held her was burnt by the fire, leaving a piece hanging down behind. This became her tail and she was the mother of a whole new monkey tribe.

The Black Dog

The tiger has naturally a great fascination for the hill and forest people and there are hundreds of stories about him. Some of them give him a human origin, saying that he was one of two brothers who took the wrong path. This story is current in different forms in several villages along the north-eastern frontier.

The two brothers Niso and Niyu used to go hunting in the thick forest on the banks of the Sipi River. They set traps for squirrels and birds and returned home at sunset. But



Niso, who was the elder of the two, used to get up very early in the morning and eat half of whatever was in the traps; there was no way of cooking it, so he ate the meat raw. Then he would come home before Niyu was awake, and lie down again pretending that he had been all the time in bed.

When they went out later, they would find the traps

robbed and Niyu used to wonder what sort of man it could be who ate so much raw meat.

This went on for many days. Then one evening, Niyu pretended to be very tired and went to bed early. But as soon as Niso was asleep, he got up quietly and went to hide behind a tree near the place where the traps were set. In the early morning, he saw his brother come and remove a squirrel from the trap, tear it in half and begin to eat it.

Niyu came from his hiding-place and cried, 'Brother, why do you do this? These things belong to both of us; take them and cook and eat them properly.'

But Niso said, 'I can only get strength from raw meat. If you don't like what I have done, I am sorry. From today I shall live in the forest and eat all my food raw. I have been robbing you for a long time, but now I shall repay my debt and give you all the help I can.'

As he spoke, his body changed its form and he became tiger. He said, 'Whenever you go hunting I will help you, but on one condition, that you tell no one that your elder brother, in order to eat raw meat, has turned into a tiger of the jungle. If you tell anyone, I shall hear of it, and I shall take the form of a black dog and pursue you. There will be war between us. If you can kill me, well; but otherwise I shall kill you.'

Niyu said that there was no need of this gloomy talk, for he certainly wouldn't tell anybody. The tiger, pleased, went away into jungle.

After this Niyu often used to go hunting and every time his tiger brother caught a deer or wild boar for him. So Niyu lived well and became rich and fat. But in time he grew old and one day, as he sat by the hearth, his children and grandchildren asked him about Niso. 'We once had an uncle: where has he gone?' Niyu put them off and didn't say a word for fear of the black dog.

Then Niyu grew so old that he had no strength, not even to go out of the house. His children went on pestering him for news of their uncle. Niyu said to himself, 'I am old

now; my hunting days are over. Even if the black dog does come, what can it do to me?' So Niyu told his children and grandchildren what had happened.

But, Niso was listening and heard all that passed. He turned into a black dog and sat below the house which, like all houses in the hills, was built above the ground, on piles. Niyu was there by the hearth, tugging at his hair with his comb. But somehow he dropped the comb and it fell through the floor to the ground below. Niyu said to one of his sons, 'My comb has fallen down; go and get it for me.' When the boy went down he could not find the comb, for the black dog was sitting on it. He climbed up into the house again and told his father.

Then the black dog moved a little and allowed part of the comb to show. Niyu looked down through the floor and saw the comb and the black dog sitting on it. He took his bow and arrows and climbed with great difficulty down from the house. Then Niso became a tiger again and sprang at his brother. At the same moment Niyu fired his arrow. The arrow pierced the tiger and killed him, but in his spring the tiger hurled Niyu to the ground: he was old and he too died.

The Two Friends

Tiger and Frog were friends. Frog used to go to visit Tiger's house and Tiger always gave him a good meal of meat. One day Frog said, 'Friend, you always give me very good food when I visit you. Now you must come and pay me a return visit.'

Tiger replied, 'Friend, I am a meat-eater. If you can give me some meat I will certainly come to your house.'

Frog said, 'Of course, you will have what you like; come tomorrow to my house.'

Frog went away rather worried how to feed his friend properly and went all over the place to try and find some meat for him. Presently, as he was going along the bank of a river, he came across a horse which had come down to drink water. Frog hopped on to the horse's back and tried to bite off some of his flesh, but the horse kicked him and broke his legs. This is why even today the frog cannot walk straight.

Frog made his way slowly and painfully back to his house and a little later Tiger arrived for his visit. Frog received him with honour and made him sit down. But he felt very ashamed that he had no meat to offer him. So he crept slowly up to the loft and there began to remove the flesh from his own legs. This hurt him very much and he cried, 'O mother, I am going to die.'

Tiger heard him and climbed up to see what was the matter. When he saw that Frog had cut off his own flesh for him, he felt very bad about it and said, 'Friend, there was no need for you to do this. In any case, I wouldn't eat your flesh.'

He comforted him as well as he could and went away. But Frog felt so ashamed that he left his house for good and went to live in the river.

This is why the frog always lives in the water and why his legs are so thin.

The Flying Elephants

There is a very widespread belief that originally elephants had wings and could fly about. Typical of many is this story, told by the Saoras living in the beautiful Orissa hills.

In the old days elephants had four great wings, and God himself used to ride on one of them. But after the world was made and men began to live on the earth, the elephants became a nuisance. They crowed like cocks and flew up into the sky; when they were tired they came down and perched



on the roofs of houses. They were so heavy that the houses collapsed beneath them.

When God heard of this he was annoyed, and decided that he would have to do something about it. So one day he invited the elephants to a feast and gave them so much to eat and drink that they staggered away to a quiet spot and lay down to sleep. While they were asleep, God cut off their wings. Two of them he gave to the peacock, who in those days had no tail, and that is how the peacock got his tail. The other two he stuck on the plantain tree, which accounts for its great leaves.

When the elephants woke up and found they had lost

their wings, they were very angry; they ran away into the jungle and ever since have been afraid of men.

The Tortoise-Child

The Khamptis of Assam tell a strange story of a tortoise, born of human parents, who turned into an elephant. Many village people believe that hills, rivers and trees are inhabited by spirits, good and evil, who can influence the lives of men. The dao mentioned in this story is a sort of hatchet, an instrument of almost universal use, used for clearing the forest, killing animals and was an important weapon in the old days of war.

Long ago there was a man and his wife who had no children. They grew old and said to one another. 'We are growing old and we have no child.' They went therefore to a holy tree and offered it sacrifice. Every day they used to pour water on the tree and salute it. After they had done this for many days, a spirit came out of the tree and asked the old man and his wife, 'Why have you been making these offerings to me for so long?'

They replied, 'We are now old, yet we have never had a child and we have been offering you water so that we may have one.'

The spirit replied, 'Good. You will have a child and you need not make offering to me any longer.' When the old people heard what the spirit of the tree said, they returned home.

On that very day the old woman conceived and, when ten months were complete, gave birth to a tortoise. The parents complained to one another, 'After the immense trouble we took to please the spirit of the tree all he has given us is a tortoise.' But afterwards they thought, 'At least we have some kind of child, even if he is only a tortoise.'

The old woman tried to feed the tortoise at her breast, but he refused to take it and asked for rice instead. They thought that the baby would only eat very little, but he demanded two large leaf-bundles of it. This was on the second day and on the third day he ate three bundles. On the fourth day he ate four bundles and thereafter every day he ate one extra bundle until, when he was twenty days' old, he ate twenty bundles of rice in a single day.

The old parents, seeing that their entire store of rice was being exhausted, were alarmed and sighed for the day when they had no family. 'This child is not even a human being and because of him we are likely to be entirely ruined. If he eats as much as this when he is only twenty days old, what will he do when he is grown up?'

So they went to the tree and said to the spirit who lived there, 'We don't want this child, please take him back.' But the spirit took no notice of them.

Now his parents had called this tortoise Ailung, and since the spirit of the tree did not take him away, his mother said to him, 'You are eating up all our food and yet you don't do any work.'

Ailung replied, 'Mother, ask my father to make me a really good dao.'

The mother said, 'But Ailung, what will you do with a dao?'

The tortoise replied, 'I'll go to the forest and make a field there.'

Although the mother wondered how the child could use a dao since he had no hands, she said to her husband, 'Ailung wants a dao,' and he made his son not one but two.

Ailung took the daos to the forest. When he arrived there, he turned into an elephant, using the two daos as tusks. In a single day he cut the trees of three hillsides, but there was a very tall rubber tree standing between the hills and he left it standing, for he thought, 'This is a beautiful tree and I can rest in its shade.'

In the evening Ailung removed his tusks and turned them into daos and became a tortoise again. When he returned home his father asked him how much forest he had cleared. Ailung said, 'Don't ask me now, but when I've completed the work and the harvest is ready for reaping I'll show you.'

Now in the rubber tree which Ailung had left standing there lived a great spirit who had many children. When he saw that all his forest was cut, he was afraid that his own tree would also be destroyed and he would have nowhere to live, so he sent his children into the clearing. He played his flute and as he did so, the children raised up all the trees and made them as they were before. When the forest had been restored the children returned to the rubber tree and stayed there with their father.

Next day when Ailung returned to the place and saw what had happened, he was very angry. He turned himself into an elephant and in a towering rage again destroyed the forest. This time he decided that he would not spare a single tree, but when he came to the rubber tree the spirit and his children came out, and fought against him. It was not much use, for Ailung was very strong and soon had them at his mercy.

But the tree-spirit said, 'We will do anything you want us to do, but don't kill us.'

Ailung said, 'Set fire to whatever I have cut and make the clearings properly and then sow seed in the ashes.'

So the spirit and his children prepared the clearings and sowed the paddy-seed that Ailung gave them. When the harvest was ready Ailung was very pleased with the spirit and his children. He said to them, 'Do one more thing. Reap the harvest and winnow out the gram and bring it to my house.'

Ailung then took his tortoise form and went home and said to his parents, 'The harvest is ready and the porters will soon be bringing the rice to the house.' They did not believe that their son had actually made any field, but presently the

spirit and his children appeared carrying great loads of rice, so much that there was nowhere in the house to store it. Ailung said to his parents, 'Give all these labourers a good meal. Hence forward I will not live with you any longer, but will go to dwell in the forest.'

In their presence Ailung changed into an elephant, putting his daos as tusks and then went away into the forest, as the first of all the elephants. Since his parents treated the spirit and his children so generously the gods have ever since lived happily on earth and are kind so long as men remember them.

The Dog and the Pig

A certain man had a dog and a pig, who did nothing but eat; they were far too lazy to do any work. After a time their owner decided to make them do something for their living and told them to go and plough his fields.

The pig worked all day, scratching the soil with his jaws until the entire surface was broken up. But the dog lay down in the shade of a tree and slept.

In the evening the pig went home and, directly he was gone, the dog got up and went round the field, rubbing out the pig's footprints and leaving his own in their place. Then he too went home.

That evening the man asked the dog and the pig what they had done. The pig said, 'I ploughed the whole field, but this dog slept all day under a tree.' The dog said, 'It was I who ploughed the field: this pig only dug for roots.'

The man said, 'I don't believe either of you. Tomorrow I myself will go to see the field.'

Next day, when the man went to his field he saw the dog's footprints everywhere, but no sign whatever of the pig. He came home and abused the pig, saying, 'You didn't

do any work at all.'

Ever since, the pig has had to live outside the house, and when he is offered food he is called with the words 'Momo'. This means 'No, no, you did no work.'

But the dog is allowed to live inside the house, and is called with the words 'Ko-ko', which mean 'Yes, yes, you did your work.'

The Snake-Husband

There was once an old woman who had two daughters. The elder daughter was very beautiful but nobody thought anything of her because she could not weave properly. The other girl made cloth with beautiful patterns but this girl could only weave plain cloth, and the others used to laugh at her.

Once, when she was feeling very miserable about this, she did not eat all day and in the evening went down to bathe in the river. As she was bathing a great snake came out of the water and she started to run away. But when the snake saw how beautiful she was, he turned into a handsome youth and said, 'Why are you frightened?'

The girl replied, 'Because I thought you were a snake.'

'No, I'm not really a snake,' said the youth. 'I live beneath the water and I can take the form of snake or man as I please.'

Then the girl, seeing the boy's beauty, came to him and they fell in love with one another. After that, every evening when the girl had eaten her supper she used to go down secretly to the river to meet her lover on the bank. Every morning the youth would turn back into a snake and go down to his house beneath the water.

One evening when they met as usual, the girl refused to speak, for she was very sad because she could not weave



properly. After a lot of persuasion she told her lover about it and he said, 'Don't worry about this. In the morning I will come in my beautiful skin and you can take me to your house and when you sit at your loom you can hold me in your lap and copy the patterns on my body.'

The boy turned again into a snake and went into the water and the girl sat all night on the river-bank. At dawn he came back as a snake in his beautiful skin. The girl took him home and sat down to her loom with him on her lap.

The other girls came to watch, but when they saw the snake they ran away in fright. Soon she was making the finest cloth in the whole village.

That evening the girl carried the snake down to the river-bank and he turned into a man again. In a few days the girl had made three beautiful pieces of cloth. She gave one to her sister, one to the other girls so that they could imitate it, and kept one for herself.

After a little while, the snake said, 'This is no way to live. The right thing will be for me to marry you and take you to my house.'

'But how can I live under the water?' asked the girl.

'Don't worry about that,' he replied, 'I will come to you with a great party and many instruments of music and you'll be able to live in the river quite happily.'

So next morning the girl said to her mother, 'I am going to my husband.'

'What husband is this?' asked the mother.

'It's my snake-husband who taught me to weave.'

'But how can you do such a thing? He will kill you.'

The mother alternately abused and cajoled her, but she refused to listen.

After two days the boy came with a great procession and playing many instruments of music. To the eyes of the villagers the visitors looked like snakes, but to the girl they looked like human beings. As her husband was taking her away, she said to her mother, 'I'm going now, but if ever you're in trouble come to the bank of the river and call me.' So the girl went down into the river and deep down below the water there was a palace of gold and the two lived there happily and had many children.

Then one day her younger sister said, 'Why shouldn't I too marry a snake?' She went to the river and found a hole where a black snake lived. She lay down beside it hoping that this snake also would turn into a handsome youth and marry her. But when he came out of his hole, he was just a snake and killed her.

Now the girl's mother had no one to look after her and she was very old; she could only hobble about and there was no food in the house. So one day she went weeping to the river bank and cried, 'My daughter, my daughter.' Night fell and the girl came out of the water and said, 'Come with me.' She refused, but her daughter tied a cloth round her face and dragged her down. There the old woman saw the palace of gold and a crowd of children crying, 'Granny'. They surrounded her, played with her dress and climbed into her lap. Suddenly they turned into snakes and coiled themselves round her. She threw them off in fright and they became human again.

After this the old woman said to her daughter, 'Send me home this is too much for me.'

Her son-in-law said, 'Very well, but let me give you something to take back with you.'

He put some sand in one piece of cloth and a little grain in another. He found a scrap of rope and a bit of wood each as long as his little finger. He tied these things up in a bundle and gave them to the old woman saying, 'Don't look at them on the way; take them home and put each of them in a separate basket as big as you can find. Then after a week open the baskets and see what you have.' Then he took her out of the water.

When she was left alone on the bank the old woman thought, 'I've been on a visit to the house of my daughter and son-in-law and they've given me no money but only these wretched things.' She felt so upset that she threw the bundle on the ground. But later she thought, 'Perhaps I had better do what my son-in-law said', and picked up all the things she could find and put them in little baskets. After a week she opened the baskets and found the bit of wood had turned into dried fish, the rope had turned into dried meat, the sand had become rice and the grain had become rice-seed. But since she had thrown away most of what her son-in-law had given her and had only put what was left in small baskets, there was not very much. But even then there

was now something for her to eat and she lived on what she had until she died.

The Yak

The Sherdukpens living in the western part of the North-East Frontier Agency, not far from the Bhutan border, have an impressive dance to illustrate the origin of the yak, that useful animal which lives in the high northern hills.

In Tibet lived an old man Apapek and his wife Jammu. They had three sons—Gappasambru, Tepagalu and Dagyesambru. The two old people, who were very rich, divided their property between Gappasambru and Dagyesambru but they gave nothing to Tepagalu. He went to them and asked for his share, but they refused to give him anything.

This naturally made Tepagalu very sad and he said to himself, 'I've no share of the property and I've nothing to eat; what's the use of living here? I had better go anywhere I can get food.' He left his home and went to the Great Lord and told him his story. 'Tell me,' he said, 'If I'll ever get a share of my parents' wealth.'

The Great Lord said, 'You will never get it.'

He went to the spirits and said, 'Tell me if I'll ever get a share of my parents' wealth.'

And the Wind too said, 'You will never get it.'

So at last in despair Tepagalu went to the forest. As he pushed his way through the trees, he came to a great cave in the side of a hill. There were streams of water flowing down both sides of the cave leaving a dry path in the middle. The boy went into the cave and, though it was very dark, made his way deep into the ground. After he had gone a long way, he found an enormous bird called Jatung-Tung-Karmu sitting on three great eggs. He greeted the bird

and said, 'Whatever do you eat in a place like this?'

'I eat rice,' said the bird.

'I have been hungry for many days,' said the boy, 'and I'm weak through fasting. Could you give me a little rice?'

The bird replied, 'I've no rice myself, for I usually go out and find it. But I can get some for you. The difficulty is that I'm sitting on these three eggs and if I leave them they will get cold and be spoilt.'

The boy said, 'Go and get the rice; I'll keep your eggs warm.'

The bird agreed to this but said, 'Whatever you do, don't turn these eggs upside down.'

The boy promised that he would not touch the eggs at all but would simply hold his hands above them to keep them warm. So the bird went away and the boy warmed the eggs with his hands.

But presently he got curious and picked up the eggs to examine them and put them back upside down.

After some time the bird returned with the rice and gave it to Tepagalu, but when she saw that her eggs were upside down she was very angry and went away.

When the bird had gone, the boy wept for loneliness and wondered what he should do. But presently he remembered that God was merciful and that he might allow something to come out of the three eggs. He took one of them in his hand and called on the Great Lord saying, 'Have pity on my despair; allow something to come from this egg to help me.' He broke the egg with his stick, and a white yak came out of it and went flying through the air to the Great Lord. The boy broke the second egg and a red yak came out of it and went flying to the spirits of the forest. They boy cried, 'There is but one egg left; allow this at least to be of use to me.'

He broke the egg open and a black yak came out of it and went down into the water. The boy then came out of the cave and, taking a rope in his hand, sat outside by the stream for a whole year. All this time the black yak



remained in the water, but at the end of the year she raised her head above the surface and Tepagalu caught her with his rope. He took her home and kept her with him. After a time she bore a calf and the boy got milk and ghee. In three years she had three calves.

When Apapek heard of this, he came with his two other sons and they all lived together and danced in honour of the animal that gave them their food.

The First Mithun

The Mithun, a splendid animal rather like a bison, is cherished by all the tribes of India's north-east frontier. It is almost a form of currency, for it is the basis of wealth; it is used to pay fines, is part of the bride-price given for a wife, and is generally offered in all important sacrifices. This story, told by the Akas, describes how the first mithun came into being and was offered in sacrifice to drive away disease.

Buslu-Ao, the first man in the world, had three sons and three daughters. The boys' names were Siji-Jao, Machlo-Jao and Chalo-Jijao and the girls' names were Phibi-Chisi, Machlo-Chisi and Chalo-Michisi.

There were no other people in the world, so naturally when they grew up the boys could not find wives and the girls could not find husbands and their father decided that they would have to marry each other. So Siji-Jao married Phibi-Chisi, Machlo-Jao married Machlo-Chisi and the four of them lived happily together and worked hard in their houses and their fields. But Chalo-Michisi, though she had married him, was not happy with Chalo-Jijao, for she said, 'How can I live with my own brother?' And she refused to go to her husband or work for him. In this way a whole year went by in constant quarreling until they all said to the boy, 'Your wife is useless. She doesn't love you and she won't work.' Chalo-Jijao put up with it for a long time, but one day he beat his wife and she lay down in a corner of the house ashamed and miserable.

But when the others went to the fields, she got up, took bamboo vessels in her basket and bottle-gourds to fill them and went down to the river for water. When she reached the river, she put the basket on her head and placed the gourds as horns on either side; she put the strainer used for rice-beer as a tail and tied the bamboo tubes to her arms and

legs. Then she ate her own clothes and this made both her sides swell. In this way she turned into a mithun and wandered away into the jungle and stayed there.

In the evening when the others returned from the fields and did not find her in the house they supposed she was hiding somewhere and was still cross after the quarrel, so none of them went to look for her.

Two days passed without any news of the girl and then Chalo-Jijao got into a state and went to find her; he had hardly started when the bumble-bee told him that she had turned into a mithun and was in the jungle, a little distance from the water-point. Chalo-Jijao hurried to the place and there sure enough was Chalo-Michisi in the form of a mithun. Bursting into tears, he caught her and led her back to the house. He called the whole family and showed them what had happened. They were all astonished, and Buslu-Ao said, 'We cannot allow my daughter to wander about in the jungle. We must make proper arrangements for her. I suggest we tie her up near the house.' He made a strong rope of cane and tied her to a pillar. They offered her food and water, but she refused to eat or drink; she just stood there weeping.

Then Buslu-Ao, seeing the tears rolling down the mithun-face, said, 'You are my daughter—in fact you're both daughter and daughter-in-law, but the Great Lord has turned you into a mithun. What can we do? Don't take on so; you should eat just as we eat.'

The mithun replied, 'It is true that the Great Lord has turned me into a mithun and I'm quite happy about it, but at the same time I'm a woman and I can't possibly live without a husband. Let me go and I will find a mate.'

When her father heard this, he released her and she wandered away in search of a husband, but it was not so easy to find one.

First of all she saw a dog in the distance and thought to herself, 'If I can marry him, that might do.' But when she approached him, she saw that he was too small and decided

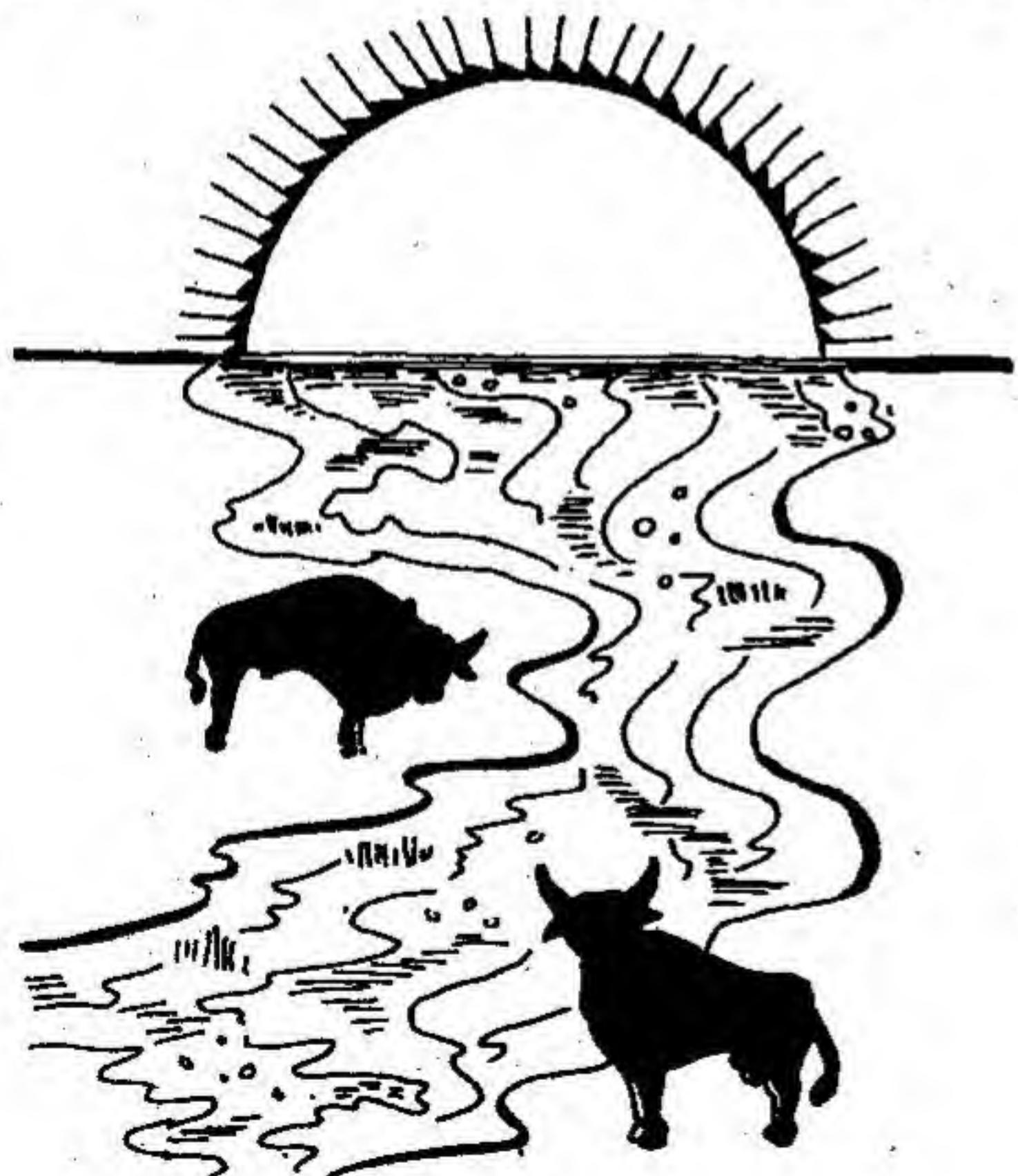
that he wouldn't make her a husband.

So she left the dog and went wandering along until she saw a pig.

At first she thought he might do, but when she came a little nearer, she thought, 'His colour is the same as mine, but he too is far too small.'

Then in the distance she saw a horse and was very happy, for she thought that here at last was a suitable mate. When she came a little nearer, however, she saw that he had a different kind of legs, a different tail, a different face and decided that he wouldn't do either.

So the mithun left the horse and went wandering a long until she saw a great deer far away. At first sight she



thought that he would be ideal, but when she came a little nearer she found that he too was altogether different; for one thing, the horns were too big. In this way she met a bear, a tiger, a monkey and all the animals of the forest in turn, but not one of them was sufficiently like her to be her husband.

At last she came to the place of the rising of the sun. She crossed the river of cold waters and the river of hot waters, and there at last she found, standing in the sandy bed of the stream, a male mithun. When she saw him far off she was thrilled and called to him and the male mithun answered her. She went nearer and saw that he had the same colour, the same kind of face, the same kind of tail and knew that at last she had found her mate. They came together at once and in due time she bore two calves.

Meanwhile the mithun's human husband Chalo-Jiao fell ill and the family called the priest to see what was the matter. He declared that the boy would only be cured if they sacrificed a mithun.

'But where shall we find a mithun?' they asked.

The priest replied, 'There are mithuns, but far away, beyond the cold river and the hot river.' So the two elder brothers, Siji-Jao and Machlo-Jao, went to find them. They came to the place of the rising of the sun and crossed the cold river, but they could not cross the hot river. So they stood where they were on the bank with leaves and salt in their hands and called to the mithuns on the far side, and when they saw the salt they began to cross the river. But the heat was too great for them, and only the mithun who had been Chalo-Michisi and her two calves survived. The brothers brought them home and tied them up in front of the house.

Busu-Ao's wife came out to look at them and, realizing that this was her own daughter, said, 'It is true that she was once our daughter, but the gods desire to have her. We will just have to sacrifice her.'

That was that, and they tied her up and tried to kill her,

but could not even break the skin with their axes. Then Buslu-Ao's wife said, 'I told you so. She is our daughter and it's not possible for us to kill her, unless perhaps we tell her that it's her duty to die.'

The old woman went to her mithun-daughter and whispered in her ear, 'You were once a human being and it would not have been possible to sacrifice you, but now you are a mithun and it is your time to die.'

Then she moved aside and the others struck the poor creature with their daos and killed her.

ADVENTURES IN A MAGIC WORLD

The Hospitable Birds

ARaja's son and a blacksmith boy, an Agaria, became great friends, but as they were always up to mischief, the Raja banished them into the jungle. As the two boys went along a path through the great trees they saw some sparrows eating and asked them, 'Where can we get a little food?'

'You must go to Aonrapur Patan Bazar,' said the sparrows. 'You can't get anything to eat here.'

So the boys went on their way till nightfall, when they camped under a cotton tree; one boy slept and the other kept awake to tend their fire.

Now in that tree there lived two birds whose names were Chakka and Chakki, for they loved each other like the two parts of a grindstone.

Chakka looked down and said to Chakki, 'Here are two hungry travellers staying beneath our tree and it is our duty to give them something to eat.'

Chakki said to Chakka, 'We haven't got anything to give them, but if we fall down into their fire, we will be roasted and they will get a good meal from our bodies.'

So the birds fell down into the fire and the Agaria boy, who was watching at the time, divided each bird into three pieces and roasted them. He ate three pieces himself and put three aside for his friend. When the Raja's son woke up, he too ate his supper and the Agaria boy lay down to rest. When he saw that his companion was sound asleep, the

Raja's son went quietly away by himself. He wandered across the world and prospered, until at last he heard that his father had died and he went home and became Raja in his stead.

But when the Agaria boy awoke he was very frightened. 'Perhaps my friend', he thought, 'has gone to the Anorapur Patan Bazaar', and he went on alone, searching for him everywhere. After some days he came to the Hathak River, on the bank of which lived a very old woman. The boy stayed with her and served her in every way. One day she said: 'What can I give you?'

'I want to see Aonrapur Patan Bazaar,' said the boy.

'But that is very difficult', she said. 'However, pick a mango over there and come back without looking round.'

The boy picked the mango, but he could not resist looking round and it flew out of his hand back to the tree. A second time he tried and the same thing happened, but the third time he brought the fruit to the old woman and she showed him the way to the bazaar. As he went along, the mango turned into a beautiful girl.

They passed through the strange and wonderful forest, where the wild figs were as big as grindstones and as they fell between the trees they crashed down *dam-dam*. The leaves were soft as wax. They went on into a dense bamboo grove; when the wind blew, the old bamboos clashed together like iron bars clashing *than-than*, and the soft young bamboos sounded *kasmas-kasmas* like a dry drum. The korkot leaves brushed against each other and frightened the old fox that hid beneath them. Tigers leapt to and fro and leopards played like dogs. The tigers thundered, the leopards grunted in their throats, the monkeys chattered, the deer jumped in the air. The long-horned gaur and wild buffaloes with every hair erect stamped to and fro.

But they came at last to open country and there met seven thieves. They were cruel and evil men and they threw the boy into a well and carried off the girl. But she turned back into a mango and they were frightened and put it

down under a tree.

After a time there came to that very place the boy who had become Raja. He was hunting and he rested under the cotton tree where Chakka and Chakki had died. By now the children of these birds had grown up and they sat talking in the branches. The elder bird told his wife the whole story of the Agaria boy and described the well into which the thieves had thrown him. The Raja heard them talking and went at once to the well and saved his friend. They went on together and found the mango lying beneath a tree. As they went towards their home, the mango turned once more into a girl and out of her body came Aonrapur Patan Bazaar and there were all the joys of a great market. There were no shopkeepers in that bazaar, there were only shops and every one helped himself to what he wanted. The Agaria boy was very pleased, but he turned the bazaar back into a mango and went home. Then every morning the mango turned into a great bazaar, where he got everything he wanted, and every evening it became a beautiful girl who delighted him as his darling wife.

The Golden Peacock

A Goatherd had a little son whom he loved greatly. One day the boy said, 'Give me an axe and a blanket, for I want to earn my own living.' When he had them, he went out into the forest and made a clearing; he cut the branches of trees for fire and sowed rice in the ashes.

When the rice grew up the boy took his blanket every day and went to watch in the field. But one day he was tired and slept all night. While he slept there came a peacock with golden wings and ate the rice. When the boy awoke in the morning and saw his crop ruined, he wept bitterly. But one golden feather had fallen in the field. He took it home and

stuck it in the roof.

One day a barber came to the village. When he saw the golden feather in the roof, he reported it to the Raja, who sent his sepoy to fetch the boy and his feather. When the Raja asked him how he had got it the boy replied, 'I found it in my field.'

Hearing this, the Raja said, 'Bring the living creature from which this feather came, or I will bury you in the ground and light a fire above your head.'

The little boy was naturally very frightened, and took his axe and blanket and ran to his field. There he found the footprints of the peacock and followed them, but presently the tracks ended for it had flown into the air and the boy sat down and cried. As he was weeping a sambhar came by and said, 'Little brother, why are you weeping?'

The boy said, 'Brother sambhar, the Raja has sent me to find the peacock with golden wings, but I can see no trace of it and now he will bury me in the ground and light a fire upon my head.'

But the sambhar took the boy on his back and ran through the jungle till they found once more the trail of the Golden Peacock. Then the sambhar went away and the boy followed the marks until they disappeared again.

Once more the boy sat down to weep and now an antelope came by and said, 'Why are you weeping, little brother?'

The boy said, 'Brother antelope, the Raja has sent me to find the peacock with golden wings, but I can see no trace of it and now he will bury me in the ground and light a fire upon my head.'

So the antelope took the boy on his back and ran through the jungle till they found again the trail of the Golden Peacock. Then the antelope went away and the boy followed the trail.

But after a time the peacock must have flown into the air again, for the marks disappeared, and the boy sat down weeping bitterly. Then a tiger came by and said to him,

'Little brother, why are you weeping?'

The boy replied, 'Brother tiger, the Raja has sent me to find the peacock with golden wings, but I can see no trace of it and now he will bury me in the ground and light a fire upon my head.'

So the tiger took the boy on his back and ran through the jungle till they came to a steep crooked hill and a flat plateau, where the green bamboos sounded *kach-mach kach mach*, where the dry bamboos made a noise like the beating of a drum. There were flowering trees there and twelve bears cried 'Ho!' and sank back on their buttocks waving their paws in the air. There, when a leaf fell thirty-five tigers ran to see the sight. It was a magic place and far away on a high tree the boy saw the Golden Peacock. But it was so far away that he sat down and cried again, for he was very small. But an elephant came by and said, 'Little brother,



why are you weeping?"

The boy replied, 'Brother elephant, the Raja has sent me to find the peacock with the golden wings, but it is far away and I am unable to reach it and now the Raja will bury me in the ground and light a fire upon my head.'

So the elephant took the boy on his back to the tree where the Golden Peacock was sitting. He broke the tree and the bird fell to the ground and the boy caught it.

When the boy brought the Golden Peacock home, the Raja was so pleased that he gave him his daughter in marriage and when he died, the boy became the ruler of the kingdom.

The Stolen Eyes

Here is a story from the wild and beautiful uplands of Baster. Part of its turns on the widespread belief that you can keep your 'soul' outside your body, hidden away somewhere for safety. The rule is that whatever happens to the container of the soul will also happen to its owner, no matter how far away he may be.

A Maria Raja had seven sons. In a neighbouring kingdom there lived another Maria Raja who had seven daughters. Both Rajas had the problem of arranging marriages for their children, but as they did not know about each other, they could not make a family alliance that would have been easy and suitable.

At last the seven sons of the Raja decided to go out themselves to seek for brides. But the Raja said that one son at least must stay behind to help him to rule the kingdom, and he kept the youngest boy, whom he loved dearly, with him. As the six elder sons went on their way, they heard about the Maria Raja with his seven daughters, and they went to him and married six of the girls with joy and

feasting. They brought the seventh girl back with them for their youngest brother.

As they were returning home, they took shelter under a great banyan tree which overlooked a tank. In this tank there lived an ogre, a wicked creature who, seeing so many beautiful girls, decided to kidnap them and destroy their husbands. He rose in the air and fell upon them, just as a cloud falls upon the sun and eclipse follows. The six brothers with their horses turned into stone, and the ogre seized the girls and kept them as prisoners under the tree. Every day he went to the jungle to dig up roots for them to eat. Every morning he used to go out and come home at night.

The youngest brother at home grew tired of waiting and soon they were all wondering if any misfortune had befallen the other boys. So he set out in search of them, and in time reached the palace of the other Maria Raja who told him that the brothers had left for home with their brides many days before. The young Prince followed the path taken by his brothers, and soon came to the tank and saw the seven girls under the banyan tree. They told him what had happened and when evening came they begged him to run away, for the ogre would return and kill him.

But the Prince by his magic turned himself into a fly, and hid in the banyan tree. The ogre suspected nothing and next morning, when he went out for work, the boy took his human form again and told the girls that when the ogre next returned they should ask him where his soul was kept. That evening the ogre came home late, and the girls pretended to be anxious about him and said, 'You come so late at times and we get worried. Please tell us where your soul is, so that if there's any difficulty we can at once come to help you.'

The ogre said, 'Beyond the seven seas and the sixteen streams there is a banyan tree. On this tree there sits a golden bird and in that bird is my soul.'

Next morning when the ogre had gone out to work, the

girls told the Prince about the bird and he at once set out to find it. On his way he passed a toddy tree in which was a bird's nest. Now every time this bird hatched its chicks, a snake used to crawl up the tree and devour them. As the Prince was passing he heard the cries of the chicks and saw the snake going up the tree. He drew his sword and killed it and went on his way. When their mother returned the little birds told her how the Prince had saved their lives. The bird, wishing to show her gratitude, flew after him and said, 'I will go with you in your quest for the golden bird.'

After a long time they came to the seven seas and the sixteen streams, and the bird took the boy on her back and carried him across. There was the banyan tree and when the boy had climbed it, he found the golden bird. As he took the



bird in his hands, at that very moment the ogre fell ill, far away where he was digging for roots in the forest.

The friendly bird took the Prince and his prize back across the seven seas and the sixteen streams, and before long he reached the tank where the seven girls were awaiting him. Now he plucked out the feathers of the golden bird, and the ogre's hair came from his head. He broke its wings and the ogre's arms were broken. He broke its legs and the ogre's legs were broken. Then with the crippled golden bird in his hand the boy went to the ogre lying helpless in the forest and said, 'If you don't bring my brothers back to life, I'll cut the neck of the bird and you'll die too.'

The ogre very hastily and trembling with fear made the brothers alive again, but all the same the Prince broke the bird's neck and the ogre died at once.

But when the youngest brother told the others all that had happened and how he had saved them, they grew jealous and wanted to kill him. The eldest brother, however, did not like this idea, and suggested that they should put out his eyes instead.

'Come down to the river-bank, brother,' they said, 'and let's catch some fish.'

There they put out his eyes and left him to his fate. When they returned to the banyan tree, the young Prince's girl asked where her husband was, and they said he would be following soon. So saying they started on their journey home. But the girl suspecting that some mischief had been done, lagged behind and presently discovered her husband blind and miserable by the river. She begged him to go with her, but he said, 'If you really love me, do what I say. Go to the kingdom of such and such a Raja, and when they see you there everyone will love you for your beauty. But you say that you will only marry the man who can shoot an arrow straight up and hit the sky.' The girl did what he said, and hundreds of young men came to marry her. But no one was able to shoot an arrow to hit the sky.

In the meantime the blind Prince managed to cross over to the opposite bank of the river, and there found a Maria driving the birds away from his maize fields. He offered to watch the crops, but the Maria laughed at the thought of a blind boy being able to drive birds away.

'But if you would just show me round your field,' said the boy, 'I'll be able to do everything you want.'

The Maria took him round the field and the boy picked up a great many stones and sat on a little platform. Every time he heard the flutter of birds' wings he threw a handful of stones in the direction of the noise, and the birds were frightened and flew away.

Now in that river lived seven Water Maidens and a ghost. Every night they used to come out and play and dance, and when they saw the boy on the platform, they asked him to join them. But he said he couldn't for he had no eyes. So the Water Maidens brought him a pair of eyes, and he was able to see and play with them. But they always took the eyes back before day-break, and the Prince became blind again. This happened for many nights and days, and then one day the boy told the Maria his whole story. The Maria was pleased with him for saving his crops from the birds, and decided to help him to get his eyes from the Water Maidens. He brought the other villagers, and they hid behind bushes near the river-bank. In the evening the Water Maidens and the ghost came to play and gave the boy his eyes as usual. Directly he got them he ran away, and as the Water Maidens and the ghost started in pursuit, the villagers came out of their hiding-place drove them back to the river.

Now the Prince went to find his bride. On his way he heard everyone talking of the beautiful girl who would only marry a man who could shoot an arrow straight up and hit the sky. He went to the place and at once shot an arrow far up until it hit the sky, and claimed the girl as his bride. But he was so dirty and in such tattered clothes that she didn't recognise him. But when he dressed himself in the clothes

and ornaments that the Raja gave him, his true form was revealed and she knew him. When the Raja heard that the boy was a real Prince, he gave him lots of money and a troop of soldiers and sent him home.

When he reached his father's kingdom, he made his camp close to the palace and invited his father and the brothers to supper, but without telling them who he was. As they were talking, the Raja described how his youngest son was missing. Then the Prince said he would tell them a story, and he told them everything that had happened to him. The old Raja recognised his son and was filled with joy, but he banished the six wicked brothers from the kingdom, and in time the young Prince ruled in his stead.

The Antelope-Girl

A Raja went out to hunt and caught a pregnant antelope. He had her tied by the legs and carried home. But his son untied her and let her go. When the Raja heard what had happened, he was very angry and banished the boy from his kingdom.

As the Prince was going sorrowfully through the jungle, the antelope came running to greet him and turned into a beautiful maiden twelve years old. He said to her, 'I am an outlaw; don't come near me or you too will suffer.' But the antelope-girl took no notice and followed him through the jungle. After a time the Prince grew very thirsty; he found a well with a little water in it, and stooped down to drink. There he saw a snake with a frog in its mouth; the frog was still living and crying 'Ter ter ter'. The Prince could not kill the snake, for that would have been a sin for him, but he resolved to save the frog. He cut off part of the flesh from his own right arm and gave it to the snake in exchange for the frog, which hopped happily away. Then

the antelope-girl and the Prince went on together to another country.

In the chief city of that land, a barber saw the girl and went running to the Raja and said, 'Here is a most lovely girl; you must certainly keep her in your house.'

'But how can I get her away from her husband?' said the Raja.

'Call for him, and tell him that if he doesn't bring you a pot of tigress' milk, you will have him hanged.'

Next day, the Raja called the boy to his court and ordered him to bring a pot of tigress' milk forthwith, failing which he would have him hanged. The boy went home with so sad a face that his girl asked him what was the matter. When he told her, she said, 'Don't be afraid. I'll see that you get the milk. Take your pots and go to find a tigress. When she attacks you, raise your right hand, and she will do you no harm.' For she had put her magic on his hand.

The Prince went far into the jungle and presently found a tigress sleeping with her two cubs. When the smell of man came to them, the tigress leapt up and ran towards the boy. But he raised his right hand, and the tigress paused, thinking, 'He comes from the house of my youngest sister.' She said to her cubs, 'He has come for milk, we must give it to him.' Then the tigress milked herself with her paws into the pots and gave them to the boy. She sent her two cubs to accompany him back to the Raja's Palace. When the Raja saw them he was afraid.

But next day, the barber came again, and said, 'Don't be afraid, you must certainly bring the girl to your house.'

'But what can I do?' asked the Raja.

'Send the husband to the Land of Ogres to fetch grain.'

Once again the Raja called for the boy, and gave him his orders. The boy returned home with so sad a face that his girl asked him what was the matter. When he told her, she said, 'Don't be afraid. I will see that you get twice as much grain as he has demanded. I'll write a message on a stick, and when the ogres see it they will give you the grain willingly.'



The boy took the stick and went far into the jungle to the Land of Ogres. There a great she-ogre was sleeping with one ear on the ground and one ear cocked listening for the coming of a stranger. When she heard him coming she sprang up and rushed to devour him. But when she read the message on the stick, she gave him what he wanted, and two of the ogres came to accompany him to the Raja's Palace. The Raja was very frightened when he saw them, and sent for the barber again.

The barber said, 'This time throw the Rani's necklace down the well and tell this boy to fetch it out.'

The Raja called the boy again, and said, 'My Rani's necklace has fallen into the well: go and get it, or I will hang you.'

The young Prince was very frightened, and when he told his girl, she too had nothing to say. But the snake and frog whom he had helped came and went into the well and brought out the necklace; they gave it to the young Prince and he took it to the Raja.

Once more the barber went to the Raja, who said, 'There's nothing we can do; this boy is too clever for us.'

But the barber said, 'Let's try once more. Call him and order him to make a grove of mango trees laden with fruit in a single night. He can never do that, and then you may hang him.'

'An excellent idea,' said the Raja.

When he heard the order, the Prince went to his girl

with a sad face, but she said, 'Eat your dinner; I will make you a mango grove during the night. Bring me a sword, and two measures of salt, and clean the sword with the salt till it shines. Then I'll become an antelope and run round the village, and when I return cut off my head with the sword.'

When night fell the antelope-girl went out and ran round the village; wherever she went, mango trees heavy with fruit sprang up. When she returned, the boy struck off her head with his sword, and she became a girl again. In the morning, the Raja saw the mango trees everywhere, and had no more to say.

After some days, the Prince decided to take his wife home. They set out and travelled many days through the jungle till they came to the very place where the antelope had become a girl. There the girl said, 'I must go back to my own people, and you to your father.' She embraced him and suddenly she was an antelope again and ran away into the forest. The Prince returned alone to his father's house.

Wealth and Wisdom

In village India, the weaver has always been a figure of fun, and there are many stories about him. But here is one about a weaver who made good, told by the Murias of Baster.

Wealth and Wisdom met by the wayside and disputed which was the greater. As they went along quarrelling, they came to a city which was full of thieves and soon after their arrival one of them stole the horse of the Raja himself. No one could discover the thief and at last the Raja went personally to find it, disguising himself as one of his subjects.

Night fell and it began to rain. The Raja sheltered on the veranda of a certain weaver. Presently the weaver's wife

came out to throw away some water and saw him and ran in crying, 'One of the thieves is hiding on the veranda.' The people ran out and began to beat the Raja, but he cried, 'I'm not a thief, I am your Raja.'

They all laughed at him, saying, 'Does our Raja go about like this? He sits on his throne.'

They went on beating the unlucky man till one of his legs was broken, and the weaver picked him up and threw him on the highroad.

As the Raja lay there in great pain Wealth and Wisdom came along, talking at the top of their voices. They stopped to see what was the matter and the Raja told them what had happened. They were too full of their quarrel to bother about that and only said, 'If you are a Raja, decide our case for us. Tell us which is the greater.'

The Raja, thinking of his injury and not wanting to offend either, declared, 'In my opinion you are both equal.'

Wealth said, 'This is no decision. Look, whichever of us can mend this Raja's broken leg will be the greater.'

Wealth brought lots of gold and silver and heaped it round the leg, but it only hurt the more. Then Wisdom tied it up with bits of wood and brought magic herbs from the forest and mended it so that the Raja was able to stand up and walk.

Then Wisdom said, 'So now I am the greater.'

'Nonsense,' said Wealth. 'What is there in mending the leg of one man? I am the greater.'

'Let us see,' said Wisdom.

They went on their way and soon came to the house of a very poor weaver youth; he was so poor that you could see his bones—all he got to eat were a few roots and mushrooms. Wealth said, 'Look at this wretched weaver. Who could be poorer and more miserable? Who could be of lower caste or more despised? If I marry him to the Raja's daughter, will you admit that I am greater than you?'

'Certainly,' said Wisdom, laughing at the idea.

Now the weaver had sown maize in his garden.

Wealth made every stalk bear four heads and every grain was gold. In time, when the merchants came to the village to buy the grain, the boy was so stupid that he sold five heads of maize for one pice. The merchants took the maize home and saw that it was gold. At that they were afraid, and decided to take it to the Raja as a present. When he saw it, he sent for the weaver and said, 'Give me all the maize in your garden and I will give you my daughter in marriage.'

He gave the Raja all his golden maize and in return received the Princess in marriage. The two went to live together in a good house in the city, but whenever the weaver saw anything rich and costly he waved his hands as if he were weaving and cried 'Tukrus-tukrus'. His wife was annoyed at this and said to him 'Now you are the Raja's son-in-law, you ought to be going to the court to learn your business.'

And she said to herself, 'If he doesn't go to the court tomorrow, I'll kill him and live without a husband.'

Then said Wisdom to Wealth, 'Well, you've married that Raja's daughter, but what good has it done him? All he can do is to cry "Tukrus-tukrus" and look for his shuttle, and tomorrow he is to die.'

Wealth answered, 'Very well, let us agree that whoever saves his life will be the greater.'

Wisdom agreed and at once went to him and filled his mind with knowledge. The next morning he got up early, bathed, went to the temple to worship and proceeded to the court. His wife was pleased and thought, 'At last my husband has learned some sense.' After that the weaver went daily to the court and in time became very clever in the arts of ruling a kingdom, until at last the Raja made him his Minister.

Now Wealth and Wisdom met again and Wealth laughed saying, 'You made that poor creature a Minister and saved his life. But if I can turn him out of office, which of us will be the greater?'

Wealth went to see a certain Brahmin in the town and

gave him a lot of gold and silver. Presently the Brahmin went to the Raja and said, 'Great One, you are a celebrated Hindu Raja. You gave your daughter to a weaver—a man of low caste—we said nothing about that; but everyone is laughing at you for making him your Minister. We beg you to remove him from his post and put another man in his place.'

The Raja answered, 'How can I turn him out? He does his work well.' The Brahmin answered, 'If he does his work so well, say this to him: "O Minister, you are a weaver and your skill is in your loom. I do not care to wear cloth made by ordinary weavers. I want a cloth made from a spider's web, to wear when I go to the temple to worship." If he gives you such a cloth within a month, well; but if not, have him killed.'

The Raja listened and when the Minister came to see him, he told him to bring a cloth made from a spider's web. The unfortunate man went home and told his wife and children what had happened. They were so afraid that they began to wither away. But the youngest son thought, 'If they all die, I will die too. I had better escape.' He took an umbrella and some food and ran away to another city and took refuge in the house of a merchant who had one daughter. The merchant was rich; he had sixty ploughs. The boy went with him to the fields, and when he crossed a stream he put on his shoes, but when he was on dry land he carried them in his hand. When he was out in the rain he furled his umbrella, but when he reached the shelter of a tree he put it up.

One day the merchant was sitting in his fields, watching his servants sowing seed. The boy came to him and said, 'Uncle, are those your ploughs and bullocks? How many bins can you fill with the chaff of so great a harvest? The merchant did not understand the question, but the boy kept on asking until at last the man lost his temper and went home. After his daughter had given him his food and returned to the kitchen he began to laugh. The girl ran back



and said, 'You haven't laughed during your dinner before; why are you laughing now?' He made no answer, so she took away his plate saying that, till he told her the reason for his laughter, he would get no food. At that he told her the story of the stupid boy. 'He's such a fool that I couldn't help laughing.' The girl said, 'Bring him here to make me laugh too or I won't give you anything to eat.'

The merchant was hungry, so he went to fetch the boy. The boy said 'I'm not coming. Go and ask your daughter if she's ripe or unripe.'

The man went and asked her. She said, 'Ripe.' Next time the boy said, 'Go and ask her if the grasses have grown or no.'

The girl replied, 'They are grown.'

When he heard that the boy went to the house. The girl had put food ready in two or four places, on the veranda, near the door, in the middle of the room, and in the kitchen. The old man went in first and sat down to his food by the door. The boy sat down in the middle of the room. When they had finished, the boy lay down and slept. The merchant said to his daughter, 'Look at the fool; when there was food on the veranda, he went and sat inside the house.'

Then the girl explained to her father the meaning of these things. 'The boy wore his shoes in the water because you can't see what is under your feet then, but in the open road you can see everything. He put up his umbrella under the tree because he was afraid some bird might let its droppings fall on him. I put those four plates to see what caste he was. Had he been of low caste, he would have sat on the veranda. But as he is of high caste, he came into the house and sat down in the room. Had he been a great eater, he would have gone into the kitchen.' She was pleased at finding an intelligent boy, of good family and a moderate eater. The merchant laughed and decided to marry his daughter to this boy.

After their marriage, the boy began to remember his family and the danger they were in. After his wife had gone to sleep, he used to cry as he thought of them, and in the morning the girl used to find the ground beneath their mat wet with his tears. After a few days she made her husband tell her what had happened, and when she heard the story she said, 'Don't be afraid. Let's go together and save them.'

When the boy and his wife reached the palace they found the Minister wasted away and ill for lack of food. But the girl said, 'Don't be afraid. Eat your food happily. I'll arrange everything. I'll give this Raja his cloth of spider-web.'



The Minister took some food and next day went to his court. After a little while the girl took a new earthen pot on her head and followed him. She greeted the Raja and said, 'You have asked my father-in-law for a cloth made of the webs of spiders. But such a cloth cannot be made like that. Here is a pot. Blow into it until it is so full of your breath that it will burst. Then we can make you the cloth at once.'

The Raja was greatly upset at this and said, 'How can I fill such a pot with my breath?'

The girl replied, 'Then how can we make a cloth for you out of the webs of spiders?'

The Raja said to his Minister, 'I have changed my mind. You needn't make me the cloth. You shall remain at my court.'

But after the Minister and his daughter-in-law had gone home, the Brahmin came to the court and asked what had happened. The Raja told him and the Brahmin said, 'Very well, the Minister has won his case for the moment. But test him once again. Ask him to bring you five pounds of mosquitoes' bones.'

So saying the Brahmin offered the Raja many rupees and went away.

The Raja sent for the weaver and said, 'Bring me five seers of mosquitoes' bones within a month, or I will have you killed.'

Once again the poor man was in despair and refused all food. But when the girl heard the story she said, 'There's nothing to be afraid of, I've saved you once and I'll save you again.'

She made him eat his food and sent him to the court. Then she put parched gram in a basket, covered it with cloth, and followed him. She stood before the Raja and said, 'I have brought the mosquitoes' bones, but I must have scales to weigh them. They can only be weighed in scales of which the beam is the wind and the pans are heat.'

When the Raja heard this, he said, 'But who can find such scales?'

And the girl said, 'And who can find five seers of mosquitoes' bones?'

The Raja said to the Minister, 'You needn't bring me what I asked. You may remain at my court.'

And the girl took her father-in-law home. When the Brahmin came, the Raja told him what had happened, and the Brahmin said, 'This girl is very clever. But now tell your Minister to do this—make a well in his house and then pick it up and put in the middle of the bazaar so that the merchants may have water to drink.'

The Brahmin presented many rupees to the Raja and went away. Once again the Raja called his Minister and told him what to do. 'If the work is not done within a month, I'll have you killed.' he said.

The Minister came home in despair and refused to eat. But the girl said, 'This is nothing. Don't worry. I will save you once again.'

But he said, 'No, this is a terrible matter.'

He ate a little food, but did not listen to the girl and dug a well inside his house. When it was ready he went to the court. The girl covered herself with mud and, taking some strong rope in her hand, followed him. When the Raja saw her, he asked her what was the matter. 'I was trying to pull our well out of the house to put in the bazaar, but it was too heavy,' she said. 'Now send your well from the palace to



help me. We will tie one end of this rope round the neck of your well and one end round our's and then your well can pull our well into the bazaar.'

The Raja was confounded by this and said, 'But how can I send my well to fetch yours?'

The girl answered, 'And how can we lift a well out of the ground and put it in the bazaar?'

Then the Raja said, 'This time you really have defeated me. I will trouble you no more. Go in peace.'

This time when the Brahmin came to the court, the Raja abused him and told him that though he might have Wealth as his friend, the girl had Wisdom and she was the stronger. He banished him from his kingdom and confiscated all his property.

Once more Wisdom met Wealth on the highroad. 'Who is the greater?' he cried.

And Wealth replied sorrowfully, 'You are.'

The Magic Flutes

A tiger was hunting in the forest. As he went along he met a wild pig and said, 'O pig, I'm hungry and I'm going to eat you.'

'The matter of eating me,' said the pig, 'can be taken up later, but first of all we must fight. If I am defeated then you can certainly eat me, but not otherwise.'

The tiger said, 'But when we fight, who will be the judge?'

The pig said, 'You can run very quickly. Go and find a judge and come back with him for our fight.'

Hearing this, the tiger went to find a judge.

There was a man called Rariu-Jija who was hunting in the same forest and the tiger approached him, and he was so frightened that he began to run away. But the tiger called

him and said, 'Don't be frightened.'

Rariu-Jija said, 'But haven't you come to eat me?'

The tiger swore an oath saying 'I haven't the least intention of eating you. All I want is that you should act as judge in a fight between the wild pig and myself.'

Rariu-Jija took a lot of persuading but finally agreed to go with the tiger.

In the meantime the pig had covered himself with wet and slippery mud. When the tiger reached the place, he said to the man, 'Now you must decide who wins the fight.' The pig and the tiger began to fight, and the pig shook himself and the mud flew into the tiger's eyes and he was so frightened that he turned round to run away. When he saw this, Rariu-Jija declared that the pig was winner and even the tiger agreed.

So the pig escaped, but the tiger was still hungry and said to Rariu-Jija, 'I'm very hungry and I'm going to eat you after all.'

Rariu-Jija protested saying, 'But you took an oath that you wouldn't. You really can't change your mind now.'

But the tiger replied, 'If you had declared me the winner I'd have eaten the pig and would have had no need to eat you, but since you have declared the pig the winner and allowed him to run away, I've got nothing else to eat but you.'

When he realized the tiger meant what he said, Rariu-Jija ran for his life until he was so tired that he could run no more and took refuge in a very tall tree with great branches. The tiger could not climb up, so he sat down at the foot of the tree, planning to eat Rariu-Jija when he came down.

Now this tree was a favourite resting-place of a herd of wild buffaloes and every evening they used to gather there for night. When they came that evening as usual, they drove the tiger away.

In the morning the buffaloes went to their grazing-grounds and when they had gone Rariu-Jija came down from the tree and cleaned the place and then climbed up

again. He did this for many days. When the buffaloes saw that every evening their resting-place was clean, they began to wonder what was going on and said to one another, 'There must be somebody here: how can we catch him?'

An old she-buffalo said, 'I am too old to go to the grazing-grounds, so I'll hide here tomorrow and catch him.'

The other buffaloes approved of this suggestion and promised that each of them would bring her a little food when they returned in the evening.

So next morning all the others went away, leaving the old she-buffalo behind, and she lay down on the ground as if she were dead. Rariu-Jija descended from the tree as usual and cleaned the place, but when he saw the she-buffalo lying there, he mourned for her and began to wash her body. As he was doing so, she tried to catch him between her legs. He was so startled by this that he jumped away just in time and hastily went back to his place in the tree. In the evening the other buffaloes returned and when they heard what had happened, they were angry and refused to give the old she-buffalo her food.

The next morning, however, she said, 'This time I won't fail, I'll certainly catch him today.'

Rariu-Jija came down again and after the usual cleaning, thinking that now the she-buffalo was really dead, washed her body carefully. But while he was doing it she caught him and this time he could not get away. In the evening the other buffaloes returned and when they saw the man held firmly by the legs of the she-buffalo they were very pleased. They said to him, 'Don't be afraid. You've done us a great service and we'll help you in every way we can. From today you'll have lots of milk to drink.' They also gave the old she-buffalo the food that they had brought for her.

Henceforward Rariu-Jija lived happily with the buffaloes. He used to clean their resting-place every day and whenever any buffalo was sick or too weak to go to the grazing-grounds he would fetch food for him from the

forest. In return he was allowed to drink as much milk as he wanted.

One day the buffaloes said to Rariu-Jija, 'Sometimes we go on journeys and when we do, how shall we know whether all is well with you or not? Make two flutes, one with a single pipe and another with two pipes. When we hear you playing on the single pipe, we'll know all is well and will continue on our way, but when you play on the two pipes we'll return at once.'

One day Rariu-Jija went down to a stream to bathe and some of his hair fell out. He thought that this hair was so precious that it should not be thrown away just like that, so he made a wooden box for it. He threw the box into the water and it floated down stream.

Far below, the daughter of the Raja of Assam was bathing. She saw the box floating down and brought it to the bank and when she opened it and saw the beautiful hair, she said to herself, 'This is so fine that I must marry the man it belongs to.' She went home and refused to eat or even speak to anybody. Her parents asked her anxiously what the matter was and said, 'What do you want? Tell us, we'll give you anything so long as you don't go on sulking.'

The girl showed them the box and the hair inside it and said, 'I want to marry the man whose hair this is.'

The Raja and Rani called men, animals and birds and asked them whose hair it was, but nobody knew anything about it. At last the crow said, 'I will go and find him.' He flew all over the place and at last came to the tree where Rariu-Jija was living. He was wandering about with a flute in each hand. The crow flew down and pecked him on the head. Rariu-Jija beat at the crow with his hands to drive him away and in doing so dropped both his flutes. The crow picked them up and carried them to the girl, 'Now certainly,' he said, 'this man will come to you.'

The girl began to play on the single flute and the buffaloes continued on their journey but after a little she wondered what the double flute would sound like and



began to play it, whereupon the buffaloes came running to her. Rariu-Jija saw them passing and supposed that they must be going to whoever had got his flutes. So he followed them until he came to the girl's palace. He went to her and asked her to give the flutes back, but she replied, 'I'll only give them back if you'll marry me.'

Rariu-Jija was entirely agreeable to this, and the two were married at once. When the Raja heard that his son-in-law had so many buffaloes and possessed a pair of flutes

that could control them at will, he decided to take them. He secretly stole the flutes and drove his daughter and her husband out of the house.

Rariu-Jija said to his wife, 'Don't let us stay here; we'll go to the tree where I lived so long'. They went there and had many daughters. And in fact they were all very happy, living in the forest with their friends, the buffaloes.

THE END OF THINGS

How Death Came to the World

To the hill people death is an interloper: it had no place in the original scheme of things. But to go on living indefinitely, as Swift showed long ago in *Gulliver's Travels*, is no use unless there is also the gift of perpetual youth, and this Singpho story suggests that death came to man, not as a curse, but as a blessing.

At the beginning people did not die and did not know how to weep. They grew very old and as they got older and older their misery increased. They could not walk, they had very little to eat and there was no joy or comfort in their lives.

In the forest there was a squirrel living in a tall tree. One day a kite flew by and the squirrel chattered in fear which annoyed the kite and it caught and killed it in its claws, throwing the body down to the ground. A man called Singra-Phang-Magam passed by and when he saw the squirrel lying on the ground he was astonished, for never in his life had he seen a dead creature. 'How is it,' he thought, 'that our own people do not get like that, lying still and unable to use their arms and legs?' He picked up the squirrel and put it in a corner of his house, covering it with a piece of cloth.

Then he called the Moon and the Stars saying, 'A man has died, come and see him.' The Moon and the Stars came weeping with all the spirits of hill and forest, and Singra-Phang-Magam and his wife wept with them. But when the

Moon and the Stars asked where the dead man was and Singra-Phang-Magam showed them the squirrel, they were angry and said, 'This is not a man, it is only an animal.'

Singra-Phang-Magam told them, 'But how has this squirrel died and why don't men die in the same way?'

The Moon and the Stars asked, 'Do men also want to die?' 'Certainly they do,' he said. 'As one grows old, life becomes intolerable.'

Then the Moon and the Stars and all the spirits said, 'If you eat the squirrel's flesh, you will all die.'

Singra-Phang-Magam cut the body up into tiny pieces and distributed it to all the men and women in the world, and as a result death came to them and they learnt how to weep.

Here is another story, told by the Akas of how death first came to the world.

At the beginning there were two Suns who were man and wife and two Moons who were man and wife. The heat of these four was so great that on earth the grass and trees withered away and men and animals died.

But the Sun's wife and the Moon's husband fell in love with one another and, since they could not meet in the sky, they used to come down to earth and when they met there, everything caught fire around them and that is why today the earth is sometimes red and sometimes yellow; when we see this we know that the Sun and Moon made love to one another there.

When the Sun and Moon came to the earth, men and animals ran away and hid for fear of being burnt to death. They gathered together in a secret place and said, 'Who can destroy these evil-doers?' But none of them was strong enough to kill a Sun or a Moon, so they went to search for someone who could.

Now there were two mighty brothers, Chou-Siphu and Khrao-Libji. When they saw the men and animals going through the forest, they stopped them and said, 'Where are you all going?' Men and animals told the two brothers what

had happened and the unhappy state in which they were living.

Hearing this the two brothers said, 'We will certainly kill these evildoers. You all hide somewhere and we will wait for them to come here and then we'll kill them.'

Men and animals hid and after a little while the Sun's wife and the Moon's husband came to earth, and Chou-Siphu and Khrao-Libji shot at them with their bows. Khrao-Libji's arrow pierced the Sun's wife and she died there on the ground; Chou-Siphu's arrow struck the Moon's husband, but did not kill him immediately and he rose into the air and fled away with the arrow in his body to his own wife in the sky and when he reached her he died in her arms. When his wife saw him pierced by the arrow she wept bitterly.

The Sun said, 'My wife had died down on earth, but the husband of my sister the Moon has died here. If now she gives his body to men and animals they too will die.'

So he went to warn men and animals. 'When my sister the Moon calls to you,' he said, 'make no reply, but when I call you may reply.'

He returned to his place and darkness fell.

With the coming of night the Moon came out of her house with her husband in her arms and weeping bitterly. Everyone was asleep except the barking-deer and the peacock in the forest. When these two heard the weeping of the Moon they cried, 'What's the matter?'

When she heard them the Moon let the body of her husband fall to the earth and cried, 'As you killed my husband so may you all—men, animals and birds—die too.'

This is how death came to the world.

But when the cock heard what had happened he roused the Sun, calling to him to come and help. The Sun came out of his house and saw that men and animals were weeping. He said, 'There is nothing I can do now. I warned you not to answer if the Moon cried to you. Now it is too late and you all must die.'

But to the hill people death is not the end. The soul lives on, in a village not unlike the villages of earth, and in time he is joined by the souls of those he loved in life. The soul continues to be one of the family: the living put out food for him: he appears to them in dreams. Many of the hill people believe that he returns to earth in another form.

